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# The Underrepresentation of African American Female Public School Superintendents: Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling of Race and Gender

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THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE  
PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS:  
BREAKING THROUGH THE GLASS CEILING OF RACE AND GENDER

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School of Education

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2015

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UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI – ST. LOUIS

GRADUATE SCHOOL

2015

*We hereby recommend that the dissertation by:*

Joylynn LaGrace Pruitt

*Entitled:*

THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE  
PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS:  
BREAKING THROUGH THE GLASS CEILING OF RACE AND GENDER

*Be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of:*

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### **Abstract**

Women, particularly African American women, have been underrepresented in educational administrative leadership at the level of public school district superintendent. Because so few women currently hold the position of public school district superintendent, studies on the characteristics of individuals who become public school district superintendents have almost exclusively been focused on men; therefore the role of school district superintendent has continued to elude very qualified women particularly African American women and other women of color who seek the position of superintendent.

This study addressed the perceptions, barriers, and challenges which impede the advancement of African American females who aspire to the position of public school district superintendency.

This study was limited to a sample size of six African American female superintendents. A narrative inquiry methodology utilized the semi-standardized interview which identified reoccurring themes. Reflections of successful African American female superintendents are revealed to encourage more African American female aspirants to seek the public school superintendency and thereby shattering the glass ceiling impacted by race and gender. The study provided implications for African American females who aspire to the superintendency, relative to preparation, practice, and policy.



### **Dedication**

This dissertation is in memory of my mother Eula Mary Pruitt, who raised me to be the strong, confident African American woman that I am today. I realize now what a wise woman my mother was and that she never wanted anything less than the best for “her baby”. The wisdom she imparted and the lessons she preached were not in vain or went unheard. Momma, you taught me to get a good education so that I could take care of myself and not depend on the system to take care of me. You taught me to never leave a task undone. You taught me to be strong when times got rough and to persevere. You showed me what it means to be loved unconditionally. Mom, you told me that being a Black female, I had to always walk with confidence, hold my head up with pride, and always, always look others in the eye.

I pray mom that you are looking down from heaven and beaming with pride to see the woman you raised me to be. The journey to completion of my doctorate put all your lessons to the test; I am so glad I listened. Growing up, watching you face adversity day in and day out, yet never yielding or giving in, has served as an inspiration in my professional and personal journeys; you made it all seem effortless. I have always tried to follow in your footsteps as you have always been the wind beneath my wings. I hope I’ve made you proud MOM.

Love Always,

Joy

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To My Charles, for your relentless push, your constant love, support, and most of all patience on this long journey. Your companionship enabled me to see and realize the light at the end of the tunnel. You have been priceless. To my children Tiffany and Willie; your mom finally did it. Thanks for being the wonderful supportive adults that you are. Chewbacca, thanks for hanging in there. To my incredible family, friends, sorority sisters of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., and colleagues; thanks for your calls, well wishes, and continual words of encouragement. Without all of you, I would not be celebrating this achievement.

Lastly, to the phenomenal African American female superintendents who participated in this study, continue to fight with courage, walk with confidence, and lead with compassion to ensure that the students, families, and communities you serve receive the quality education they deserve. Each of you is a pioneer, paving the way for the next generation of greatness.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Women have historically have been dominant as classroom educators in comparison to men. However, as studies have examined the progression of females moving from the classroom into leadership roles, history has shown males as the dominant figure in educational administration (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000). Studies have found that a disparity exists between men and women who hold higher positions in education, such as superintendent of schools (Grogan, 1994; Jackson, 1999; Katz, 2004; Young & McLeod, 2001). Rhode and Kellerman (2006) confirmed there was a disparity between males and females and the discrepancy was even more significant when it came to African American females leading in K-12 school system leadership positions.

This study explored the journey of African American females who succeeded in gaining the position of public school district superintendent, as well as the challenges and barriers encountered on the road to superintendency. Researchers speculated that women demonstrated leadership differently from men, especially when it came to advancement of women to the position of school district superintendent (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass, 1992; Rhode & Kellerman, 2006). This study addressed the underrepresentation of African American females who currently serve as public school district superintendents, their perceptions on leadership and the barriers they faced in the day to day management of a public school district. Quality female candidates for the position of public school district superintendent, particularly African American females, would be well served if mentored by a current or retired public school district superintendent before they aspired to the position. As an African American female superintendent, I believe it is important to note the challenges and barriers encountered by

African American female who aspire to be public school district superintendents far exceed any topic discussed or covered in the textbooks of leadership programs.

This study focused on the perceived barriers faced by African American females in and on their journey to the superintendency, in addition to successful strategies they used to break through the glass ceiling of race and gender inequalities. In spite of studies that chronicled the disparity that exists regarding the inequities between male and female administrators in education, Odom (2010) and Williams-Winthrop (2002) reported inconsiderable progress in increasing the representation of females (White and women of color) as well as Black males when compared to the representation of White males who attained the position of public school district superintendent. Odom (2010) further asserted underrepresentation was correlated to perceptions of race and gender. The sample population for this study consisted of 36 African American females who currently serve as public school superintendents in the seven contiguous states surrounding Missouri (Illinois, Kansas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Iowa, Nebraska, and Oklahoma).

Missouri currently has 522 public school districts. Of the women public school superintendents in the state of Missouri, five are African American (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [hereafter DESE], 2014). By comparison, there were only five African American males in Missouri who hold the office of public school district superintendent (DESE, 2014). In the seven states that are contiguous to Missouri (Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Tennessee), the number of African American females holding the position of public school district superintendent was similar except in the states of Iowa and Nebraska where there were no African American females in position as public school district superintendent.

## **Background of the Study**

Since the establishment of public school districts and the role of the public school superintendent in the United States, few women in particularly African American women have held the prestigious position of public school district superintendent. Hoff and Mitchell (2012) agreed a disparity existed in the area of educational administration and school leadership with regards to the lack of female representation as public school district superintendents. A study by Brunner and Grogan (2007) showed a greater disparity in the representation of women at the level of superintendent, particularly the African American female. Shakeshaft (1989) found lack of remedies in addressing this long-standing problem and insignificant increase in the number of African American females represented in leadership positions of urban and suburban school districts' disheartening.

Because so few women, African American and White, currently hold the position of public school district superintendent, studies on the characteristics and leadership styles of individuals who become superintendents have almost exclusively focused on men. According to Grady and Wesson (1994), the overwhelming majority of certified educational personnel were female. Females also make up the majority of professionals who have attained advanced educational administrative positions such as elementary, middle, and high school principals as well as assistant superintendent at the central office level (Glass, 1992; Grogan, 1994). The role of public school district superintendent has continued to elude qualified African American females who seek the position of the public school district superintendency. Shakeshaft (1989) also emphasized this underrepresentation had become the norm. Recently, interest has grown concerning research studies on women who sought and attained the position of public school district superintendent (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Katz, 2004; Miller, 2003). Glass (1992) and



Grogan (1994) noted career trajectory, personal commitments, and leadership style as factors that led males to the successfully ascend to the position of public school district superintendent.

African American women have continued to push the limits of goals in educational administration by setting their sights towards higher leadership roles within the public school system, more specifically the superintendency. Current studies on women in the superintendency have been derived from numerous fields including change theory and practice in educational administration and in literature on reforming educator preparation programs (Young, 2010). Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, and Ballenger (2007) contended there were few studies on women in educational administration. While the number of women holding positions of authority at the building and central office level had increased over the past twenty years, the dominant figure in these positions was still that of the White American male (Shakeshaft et al., 2007).

While the majority of African American women who aspired to the superintendency were realistic in understanding the obstacles they would face when seeking high level leadership positions, they by no means saw their goal as being one easily attained. According to Amedy (1999), the results of educational restructuring, school reform initiatives, and perceived requirements for a collaborative organizational model as well as heightened accountability from federal and state departments of education, had a profound effect on the decisions of boards of education to widen and diversify the selection criteria for the identification of potential superintendent candidates. African American females who moved up the career ladder in education (as in other professions), were often confronted with barriers that impeded their continued advancement. Smith (2010) asserted the barriers to career advancement roles of leadership for women, particularly women of color, are often referred to as the glass ceiling.

The increased number of African American females ascending to the position of public school superintendency was just a mere subset of the total growth of the group. The growth of African American females promoted to the superintendency over the past seventy years has been minimal; studies have evidenced an insignificant increase in the number of women accomplishing the superintendency (Johnson, 2012; Katz, 2014; Shakeshaft, 1989; Wickham, 2007). Shakeshaft (1989) reported a slight increase from 1.6 % in 1928 to 3.0 % in 1985. However, males comprised more than 90 % of all public school superintendents nationwide according to studies conducted prior to 1998 (Bell & Chase, 1993; Blount, 1993; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1998; Gabler, 1987). Hodgkinson and Montenegro (1999) noted that women made up approximately 12 % of all public school district superintendents in the United States. In spite of the increase of African American females promoted to administrative positions at the central office level to include but limited to coordinator, director or assistant superintendent; the increase in African American females promoted to the level of superintendent continued to be minimal. Applebaum, Audi, and Miller (2003) attested the lack of female representation as public school district superintendents was due to the belief that women displayed leadership characteristics that were gender based and at times illogical.

Data from the 2010 Decennial Survey of School Superintendents conducted by the American Association of School Administrators indicated that 24.1% of nearly 2,000 public school district superintendents employed in school districts nationwide who responded were women. That statistic reflected an increase of 11% from 13.2 % as indicated in the 2000 survey. Women comprised the majority of teachers in the United States. Studies indicated that women constituted 51% of the school population and 75% of the teaching population (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010). However, in terms of leadership positions,

women encompassed only 26% of the principalship, and only 7% of the superintendency (Shakeshaft, 1999). Shakeshaft (1999) indicated African American women embodied 28% of the school personnel, 11% of the teacher population, and 3% of superintendents.

The researcher developed this study from the personal insights, interpretations, reflections and recommendations of six African American females who currently serve in the leadership position of public school district superintendent in the states of Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. This study shared with readers the professional experiences and leadership characteristics of the aforementioned African American female superintendents as they navigated their pathway through the ranks of leadership and ultimately the acquisition of the public school district superintendency (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). While some states included in the study did not have any African American women serving in the role of public school district superintendent, the researcher used the data gleaned from surveys to determine if geographical location was perceived as a barrier for African American females in pursuance of the position of public school district superintendent.

Traditionally, women have held the distinguished position of being classroom teachers. Women who aspired to educational administrative positions typically begin their career as a classroom teacher. However, beyond the classroom, the pace of advancement slowed considerably as women attempted to progress through the ranks from teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal, principal, coordinator, assistant superintendent, and ultimately to the superintendency. Rhode and Kellerman (2006) suggested that promotion rates and patterns of females compared to males were unequal. Even when there was a cry from society to improve the quality of schools and pursue the quest for high quality, high motivation, and high success in educational administration, the contributions of women appeared to be minimized as few women

and even fewer African American women were advanced to leadership positions (Hackney, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1999; Bourisaw, 2006; Brunner & Grogan, 2000). Circumstances such as these became the reality for most women, despite their overwhelming representation in the education profession. Bell and Chase (1993) asserted since more than 70% of teaching positions were held by women it stands to reason that women should then hold proportionately more positions of leadership.

### **Women in Line to the Superintendency**

The percentage of female students enrolled in school administration preparation programs outnumbered that of males. While men have dominated the field of educational administration, there has been a significant increase of females enrolled in graduate level administration courses (Katz, 2004). In 1997, the survey of member institutions of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) evidenced that 74% of respondents to a survey on school administrative certification programs affirmed other research studies that the percentage of women students in such programs outnumbered that of men (UCEA, 1997). Grogan (1996) demonstrated that women who entered educational programs have increased in number since the 1970's. Bell and Chase (1993) asserted that since the middle 1980's, women have comprised at least 50% of the enrollment in educational administration programs developed for certification in elementary and secondary administration. Hodgkinson and Montenegro (1999) revealed that women attained 33% of elementary school administrative positions and 57% of administrative positions at the central administration level. Katz (2004) declared women represented 20% of principals at the secondary school level and 53% of elementary school principals. Katz (2004) further suggested the overall representation of women in principal positions was 41%, while the number of women in graduate educational administrative preparation programs for educational

administrative positions had significantly increased. The fact that females comprise the majority of teachers, enrollees in educational administrative coursework, and central office administrative positions has led this researcher to question the small number of female superintendents, especially African American females, across the United States.

The lack of representation of African American female administrators has translated into too few female role models in the superintendency. Moy (2011) reported the lack of role models for women was a pivotal reason why more women did not seek the position of public school superintendent. Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson (2010) compared the 2005 and 2010 Decennial Study of Superintendents by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and reported the total number of women leading school districts throughout the United States had increased by only 3% over the previous five years, from 23% to 26% during a 10 year period.

Studies on leadership characteristics of successful female leaders have been divided. Findings covering the past twenty to twenty-five years have been primarily presented from the male perspective (Brunner, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989; Wesson & Grady, 1994). Denmark (1977), Estler (1987), Haslett, Geiss, and Carter (1992) reasoned that men and women possessed and exhibited similar leadership characteristics. However, Shakeshaft (1989), Laden (1985), and Powell (1988) reported data that emphasized male and female school leaders employed varying leadership styles that were closely correlated to personal ideas on leadership and stereotypical perceptions. The limited amount of data surrounding African American female public school district superintendents was often attributed to limited representations of African American females who had successfully acquired the position of public school district superintendency. There continues to be fewer women than men who seek and secure the position of school district

superintendent Shakeshaft (1989). Educational theorists attributed the lack of representation of women stemmed from the result of a biased paradigm and did not truly represent the ever-changing female paradigm (Brunner, 1998; Estler, 1987; Haslett et al., 1992). Shakeshaft (1998) asserted:

Males and females approach the task of school administration distinctly and consequently, they respond differently in ways as a group; female administrators tend to have a different administrative style than the male administrators and the effectiveness for a female approach may be due to her different approach (p. 190).

This explanation served as an indicator for the small representation of African American women who acquired the role of public school district superintendent in comparison to the increased large number of African American females who enrolled in administrative programs designed to prepare them for positions in educational administration. My study sought to affirm theory that “limited definitions of leadership according to male models or theories must be widened to include female administrators’ beliefs, values and experiences” (Campbell, 1996, p.9).

The studies on whether there were distinct differences existing in leadership practices of women and men generated varying results. There are studies which contend there were indeed distinct differences in the effective leadership styles utilized by women and men serving as public school district superintendents (Katz, 2004; Johnson, 2012). Other studies contended that women lead with their heart while men lead with their head. Moy (2011) and Hackney (1998) argued that a person’s sex was not a determining factor in the leadership style they displayed, however, their socialization within respective into gender roles could be. Women who seek to attain the role of superintendent were often characterized in two ways: traditional and non-traditional. Chase (1995) declared that a person’s leadership style bears a direct correlation to

his or her personal beliefs, values and norms for the workplace environment. Non-traditionalists are individuals who are intent on defining who they are by creating their own leadership style; they want to carve out their own unique style, and stand out when being compared to other leaders. Brown (2014) defined traditionalists:

As individuals who tend to conform to what they perceive as the expected role and those who over conform and are either too authoritative or at times abdicating their leadership to others.

Grogan (1996) asserted that women responded differently to environments based on their gender identity. Grogan (1996) argued further that women and men responded to situations and contexts, which called for different leadership styles.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Recent studies on the superintendency offered varying reasons for the small percentage of women who attained the position of public school district superintendent and even a smaller number of African American women. Studies by Cunanan (1994) and Glass (1992) indicated, while the number of women in the educational field qualified and prepared for the position of superintendent had continued to increase, the number of qualified women who successfully acquired the position of superintendent was still significantly below that of men who achieved the position. Explanations for the low rate of qualified African American females who acquired the superintendency position included lack of role models, opportunity and access, community bias, community demographic, and lack of mentors who possessed similar high positions that looked like the aspirants (Cunanan, 1994; Glass, 1992). Studies outlined in the review of literature provided evidence as to why African American female aspirants have not made inroads

into the position of public school district superintendent at the rate of White male and female counterparts.

Over time, the number of African American women in the queue to superintendency has increased, particularly in positions of principal and central office administrative positions. However, at the end of the day, the problem continued to exist in that limited numbers of African American females served as superintendent of schools, particularly in Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. According to Cunanan (1994) and Glass (1992) women have acquired the position of school district superintendent at a far lower rate when compared to men, thus raising the question of what was considered to be a typical pathway to the superintendency and how was the pathway different from men?

This study supplemented existing literature regarding the underrepresentation of African American female public school district superintendents. The lack of African American female superintendents was considered to be one of the variables associated with the low number of females represented in total (Brunner, 1998). The literature review emphasized studies on gender, race, and educational leadership that surrounded the underrepresentation of African American females in public school district superintendency.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study explored the recent literature on African American women who have achieved the position of public school district superintendency and identified the connections between education, training, skill set, and mentorships to which they attribute their success. Skrla (1998) emphasized a need for researchers and practitioners to garner a better understanding of the work lives of women who serve as superintendent of schools. The review of data pertinent to women or men indicated glaring discrepancies with regards to the percentage of women in the



superintendency. For the most part, the public school district superintendency has been a male dominated position dating back well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2007). Brunner (1998) and Katz (2004) argued that studies on women in the superintendency are evidence that women can be successful as superintendents thereby being an asset to the educational organization. Among the reasons outlined in these studies was the premise that women can be successful superintendents who are capable of performing the same tasks required of male superintendents.

Evidence of successful female superintendents provided important leadership traits and models for African American females who aspire to be public school district superintendents as well as the identification of effective networking strategies. The road to the superintendency for women, particularly African American women, continues to be a challenge when compared to that of their male counterparts. Studies indicated that being female increased the complexity of success in overcoming this barrier to the job (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999a; Grogan, 1996; and Shakeshaft, 1989). Katz (2004) declared that without studies on women in the superintendency, the prevalent practice of hiring men rather than women had the “tendency to create or continue the belief that women must somehow be inferior to men and are unable to succeed in that position” (p. 157). Shakeshaft (1989) reported statistical data on the acquisition of the position of superintendent and declared the representation of women administrators was in short supply. In recent years, however, the data has changed to reflect an insignificant increase in the number of women who successfully acquired the position of school district superintendent (Haar, Raskin, & Robicheau, 2009). McCabe and Jamison (1998) stressed the importance of studying women who serve in leadership positions in order to determine the qualities of leadership, similarities, and differences in their experiences when compared to the experiences of male educational

leaders. The strategies women in educational administrative leadership positions use to overcome the constraints and challenges in the role can assist other females who aspire for public school district superintendency.

This study explored the perception of barriers frequently faced by African American females who currently serve as public school district superintendents. This study intended to provide an understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and situational complexities that serve as barriers to women in achieving the superintendency. Leadership assumptions drawn by women, particularly women of color, serving as school district superintendents; their preparation and strategies for overcoming such barriers, were identified and described.

### **Research Questions**

The study intends to answer four research questions:

1. What barriers of upward mobility to the public school district superintendency do female administrators perceive to exist within their state and/or school district?
2. How are these perceived barriers related to their racial, ethnic, and gender background?
3. What career progression (i.e., patterns of promotion, job title, gender of supervisor, and length of tenure) are relevant to the trajectory to the superintendency for African American female aspirants?
4. What do current African American female superintendents perceive to be critical professional development for aspiring African American female administrators seeking the superintendency?

From these research questions, the data and insights clarified the stereotypical practices impacting the social, political, and transitional pathways for women in educational

administration. Specifically, the experiences of African American women were analyzed through narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is intended to highlight female superintendents' perception of barriers, pressures, and social structures that make it a challenge for women to attain the position of the superintendency. The career paths and experiences of the African American female superintendents who participated in this study were explored as a means to derive effective strategies and approaches that can be used in the future by African American female aspirants seeking to gain the coveted position of public school district superintendent.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following terms have been defined:

- **Achievement Gap:** Pertains to the quality of education which needs to be achieved by African American students in comparison with how White American students are achieving.
- **Administrative Experience:** Years of experience as a principal, assistant principal, chief academic officer, director and/or assistant superintendent, and other positions in educational administration.
- **Demographic Context:** Statistics associated with a school district or specific region including enrollment, racial makeup, and social economic status.
- **Descriptive Statistics:** Numbers used to summarize and describe data (information) that has been collected from surveys.
- **Educational Context:** Educational structures that support and enhance instruction, teaching and learning, and professional development.
- **Gender Bias:** Actions, behaviors, views and/or opinions about gender that impede or eliminate the opportunity for upward mobility of one gender over the other.

- Glass Ceiling: Invisible, but real barrier through which the next level of professional advancement can be seen but not easily attained.
- Leadership Practices: Administrative decision making, anticipating and responding to political conflicts, Superintendent and Board relations and interactions, and Community and District engagement.
- Narrative Inquiry: Qualitative methodology that renders itself to gathering the unique experiences of the subject which may have an inter relationship with each other or within a sampled group; inquires” into--or asks questions about and looks for deeper understanding of--particular aspects of life experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).
- Participants: For this study, a participant means survey respondents and interviewees.
- Perceived Role: Perceptions individuals hold about their own practices, traits, competencies, and values.
- Racial Bias: Actions, behaviors, views and/or opinions about race that impede or eliminate the opportunity for upward mobility of one race over the other.
- Real Power: One’s authority and ability to make decisions, implement the decisions and give out consequences, whether positive or negative, is deemed to be Real Power.
- Rural: Nonmetropolitan counties have been considered to lack easy geographical access to the big cities and their suburbs (central areas) of metropolitan areas. This is the population living in towns and municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centers (i.e. outside the commuting zone of centers with population of 10,000 or more) National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, n. d.).
- Self-Perception: Perception of one’s self and one’s self-knowledge. Having an awareness of one’s own characteristics and traits.

- Semi-standardized Interview: Utilizes predetermined questions that are asked in a systematic order. This method allows the researcher to digress from the schedule of questions to probe beyond the answers (Berg, 2007).
- Suburban: Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000 (NCES, n. d.).
- Superintendent Experience: Years of experience as a school district superintendent.
- Superintendent: Person with administrative oversight of a defined group of public schools and the educational services for students within an identified geographic area.
- Urban: Areas represent densely developed territory, and encompass residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses. Communities characterized by high rates of poverty, poverty can also be found in rural areas (NCES, n. d.).

### **Assumptions**

- It was assumed that gender and race/ethnicity play significant roles in the hiring of applicants for the superintendency.
- It was assumed that female attitudes affect leadership and management ability when leading a public school district.
- It was assumed the public school district superintendency is a socially constructed male dominated profession.
- It was assumed that the position of superintendent, either male or female, may vary according to the context of the state, region, or school district (urban, suburban, or rural).
- It was assumed that female superintendents still carry traditional and conservative notions of women's professional choices, resulting in the continued underrepresentation of African American female public school district superintendents.

- It was assumed survey respondents provided credible and reliable information in their responses.
- It was assumed similarities in African American female superintendents' perceived barriers and successful strategies existed.

### **Significance of the Study**

African American women in educational administration are underrepresented in terms of gender and race, especially at the level of public school district superintendent. This study provided relevant information on the perception of African American women in the leadership roles of public school district superintendents. There is still a void in studies which identify the barriers that exist for African American women as they navigate the challenges to the superintendency. However, this study added to existing studies regarding the underrepresentation of African American female public school district superintendency. Shakeshaft (1989) noted that such research on women who lead can only add to the data that currently exists as well as provide encouragement and support for other females seeking leadership in educational administration.

While the number of highly qualified female candidates seeking the position of public school district superintendent has increased, men still prevail in securing and retaining the position at a more significant rate over their female counterparts. Scherer (1997) conducted an extensive study on the progression of women into the public school district superintendency. However, the study found men continued to be the dominant gender in the acquisition of the public school district superintendency. Do women mimic men in how they lead, or do they lead from a perspective more characteristic of women? Do men face similar challenges? Are there additional dimensions related to gender and/or race? This study's significance served as

evidence that women, especially African American women, are capable of ascending to the position of public school district superintendency. Refusing to succumb to the pressures of the male bureaucratic structures and standards found by Cooper (1993), more African American female aspirants are encouraged to seek public school district superintendency based on their leadership experiences and trajectory to shatter the glass ceiling of the public school district superintendency.

This study provided a lens where a more accurate and in-depth portrait of the African American female superintendent was depicted. Katz (2004) identified the barriers women face to superintendency and recognized the qualities of successful female candidates that allow them to overcome barriers that exist in the acquisition of public school district superintendent. There is a need to gain more understanding of the underrepresentation of African American female public school district superintendents their administrative experiences as well as the overall role of the public school district superintendency in order to serve as a guide for African American females who aspire to educational leadership positions (Amedy, 1999). Grogan (1996) affirmed that more studies should be conducted from an orientation which centers upon understanding the meanings and contexts of the leadership experiences of female superintendents.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The number of completed and usable surveys returned was a potential limitation to the study. The number of African American female superintendents who agreed to interviews posed another potential limitation.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Urban, suburban, and rural school districts with female superintendents in Missouri and the seven contiguous states (Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma and

Tennessee) comprised the population of this study. The researcher considered conducting the study among female superintendents in Missouri solely; however, this approach severely restricted the scope of the study in terms of African American female superintendents, of which currently there are only five (DESE, 2014). Therefore, this study was expanded to include the aforementioned states. The sample in this study did not include female superintendents from non-public, private, and charter schools. The researcher centralized the outcomes of the study to African American female superintendents of public school districts in the above-mentioned states. Consideration was not given to conducting the study among the 50 United States due to the sheer size of the population to be studied. Lastly this study consisted of the potential bias of the researcher (who is an African American female superintendent) in the interpretation of the summary of the findings.

## **Chapter 1 Summary**

Women who seek advancement in the workplace have always had to work harder and put in longer hours in an attempt to prove that they are just as capable and knowledgeable as the men who seek similar advancement. The invisible glass ceiling has existed allowing women to see the path that lay ahead but not the barriers that awaited them (Smith, 2010). For the African American females and other women of color, the barriers are more frequent and harder to accomplish. The presence of women in the role of public school administration has increased but not at the same rate as their male counterparts (Hoff & Mitchell, 2012). The underrepresentation of African American females who hold the position of public school district superintendent is more pronounced. Some may speculate that this small representation is due to the fact that the states within this study, (Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska,



Oklahoma, and Tennessee) are predominately rural and therefore have a lower representation of people of color, both male and female.

The other frame of thought is the lack of role models as a contributing factor in the low representation of viable female candidates of color. Researchers like Grady, Curley, and Lacost (2008), Glass, (1992), and Grogan, (2007) have determined that one's character, leadership style, career direction, commitment, and demographic make-up have had a distinct impact on the success or lack of success for those who seek the position of superintendent; and more particularly African American females.

## **Chapter 2 Review of Literature**

States which are located in the Midwestern part of the United States boast large numbers of female teachers, principals, and central office administrators. As time has progressed from the early 1960's to the present, the number of women in the superintendency has slightly increased (Blount, 1998; Chapman, 1997; Johnson, 2012; Katz, 2004, Shakeshaft, 1989); even less for African American women. Yet in spite of this increase in representation, African American females who are superintendents remain in the bottom percentile with regards to all superintendents. Studies indicated similar data nationally (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Coleman, Collins, & Harrison-Williams, 2004; Kowalski et al., 2010). The question that should be asked is: what barriers obstructed African American women's ascension to the position of public school superintendent?

### **Female Representation in Education**

In earlier history of the United States, women were perceived as best suited to play the role of mother and housekeeper. Women first entered into the educational profession due to a shortage of men to serve as classroom teachers. Campbell (1996) reported, during the 1820's and 1830's (Industrial Revolution), America became a leader in business and industry and as men sought higher paying jobs within the private sector, they moved away from lower paying teaching positions. The shortage of men in the classroom led to problems for expanding local school systems. As a result public school districts reluctantly started to accept women as teachers at the elementary level (Stern, 1973). According to Ginn (1989), as the number of male teachers increased in the post war years, men entered the teaching profession with no intent or desire to remain in the classroom throughout their careers unless it was to advance to the position of head master. Ginn (1989) further noted women actually outnumbered men in educational

administration, particularly as elementary school principals. As women gained more access in the field of education, women began to by-pass males who according to Ginn (1989) dominated the teaching profession prior to the twentieth century. It is difficult to make a similar comparison about African American women because of the lack of data and research in this area.

While women continue to seek the positions of power and leadership in an attempt to break through the glass ceiling, they still must work through the biases of Boards of Education, State Departments of Education, and school community. These authorities based their decisions on gender and racial stereotypes that result in them favoring men over women or minority candidates (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2001). Researchers have revealed that circumstances surrounding women seeking the superintendency has not changed and are no different from 60 years ago (Alston, 1999; Bell & Chase, 1993; Christie, Jackson, & Babo, 2007). Brunner (2000) found the data on the representation of African Americans and women in public school superintendency remained stagnant with virtually no growth.

The attainment of the position of public school district superintendency was considered a pivotal goal for all women, especially African American women in educational leadership positions. Female public school district superintendency was and continues to be a position from which women could have significant educational influence. Hansot and Tyack (1981) referred to the early decades of the twentieth century as the golden age for women school administrators as thousands of women were successful in attaining leadership positions in schools: Women became lead teachers, teaching principals, supervisors, mid-level administrators, curriculum directors/coordinators, assistant superintendents, and sometimes women became superintendents. It was further evidenced that female representation in most school administrative posts, declined quickly from the end of the World War II to the 1970's (Blount, 1998). The percentage of

women superintendents plummeted from 9 to 3% during these decades and has risen only slightly since then (Blunt, 1998). Given the growth and expansion of school districts in the United States, proportionately, fewer women lead public school districts in the new millennium and even fewer African American females (citation new millennium article).

The door to teaching has for many years given women a false sense of hope and security for optimum growth opportunities to educational leadership positions. African American women have mistakenly assumed if they followed a prescribed course for advancement, the path would eventually lead to more leadership opportunities, not less. Katz (2004) reasoned women have remained in the lower ranks when compared to their male counterparts, who are thought to be more effective and efficient leaders as they escalate up the ladder to the superintendency.

This study examined the role of female leadership from the perspective of women, particularly African American female superintendents on their journey through and up to the acquisition of the position of public school district superintendent. It focused on the small number (6) of African American female superintendents in Missouri and the seven surrounding states and their journey to the superintendency. This study also identified implications for educational leadership training, institutions of higher education, professional development, legislators, and local/state Boards of Education.

Females in leadership positions have faced a myriad of obstacles. Grogan (1999) argued that African American females who aspire to the position of public school district superintendent have waded through the reefs of perception about race and gender. The Commission on Glass Ceilings (1991) emphasized the underrepresentation of women, more specifically women of color, who hold top positions in the work place, fall under the “glass ceiling” effect. Alston (1999) declared the ceiling as not being glass, but instead concrete, especially when it comes to

African American women who are aspiring for the top position. Since 1984, breaking through the “glass ceiling” has been difficult for women (Cunanan, 1994). Cunanan (1994) identified the “glass ceiling” causation as due to low representation of women in leadership, inadequate preparation, lack of recruitment, as well as a lack of financial support. Glass (1992) confirmed that while the number of women aspiring for positions in educational administration has increased more significantly than men, the ratio of women actually rising to the level of public school district superintendent has not proportionately increased.

### **Leadership and Gender Considerations**

A review of the literature revealed a lack of research on African American women in the superintendency. Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000) recognized the limited number of women in the line to the superintendency is limited. Brunner and Peyton-Caire further suggested the number of African American women were not ascending to the position of school district superintendent at the same rate as their white female colleagues. Shakeshaft (1989) pointed out a need to present research on the female superintendent from the female perspective rather than from a male perspective.

Leaders establish and communicate organizational standards that serve as the model of such for subordinates on both internal and external public while making key policy and procedural decisions. According to Hardebeck (1997), most superintendents saw their role as implementers of policy, finance and employee relations. However, men and women differ in how they approach and accomplish tasks related to public policy. Some leaders focused on being facilitators while others leaders focused on being developers. Facilitators are the enablers, motivators, and communicators. Developers are those who establish ways for others to

accomplish their goals (Amedy, 1999). The strategic planner sees the goal and helps others see it in spite of the difficulty or complexity of the task.

Often times in settings where men and women in leadership behave the same, their actions are received and perceived in different ways by their subordinates as well as by those outside of the organization. Researchers have found perceptions and stereotypical beliefs can raise concern about how women leaders lead (Haslett et al., 1992); sex role socialization (Gilligan, 1983; Powell, 1988); values (Loden, 1985); preferred management styles (Helgesen, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1989)), and response to conflict (Haslett et. al., 1992). The belief that women are less intellectually competent and rational, serve as a barrier to women being accepted as leaders and that woman should not have more power or attain a higher status than men or even attain equal to that of men (Amedy, 1999). Glass et al., (2000), debated data that indicated the discriminatory practices that exist between female superintendents and male superintendents are not considered as barriers were troubling.

The authoritative behavior in men is deemed to be acceptable. Shakeshaft (1989) noted the common assumption of many is that women and men differ in terms of ability, interest and mentality. However, Shakeshaft (1989) stressed that a person's actions cannot be determined by their gender in all situations. Such gender stereotypes can be damaging to both gender groups. Shakeshaft depicted men were often times perceived as authoritative, aggressive and sometimes sexist; while at the same time women were seen as emotional, not aggressive enough and passive. In women, similar authoritative, aggressive, and sexist behavior would be seen negatively by peers, colleagues and subordinates. However, in a positive vein, the image of man more often yielded terms such as efficient, organized, or egalitarian (Alston, (1999). With regards to women, the language include terms such as easy going, relatable, has ability to

separate work life from personal life, and encourages an environment of collaboration.

Moreover, Shakeshaft (1989) asserted because of stereotypical perceptions, female leaders find themselves working in situations where they are associated with being powerless and indecisive, thus putting them at a disadvantage in the workplace.

Having and realizing one's authority to make decisions, implement the decisions and give out consequences, whether positive or negative, was deemed to be real power. Powell wrote as part of his 1988 field study there were observable differences in leadership styles among women and men concerning how they respond to others, how they behave, internal motivation, and response to management. Men often received approval when it came to their response to underperforming subordinates. Females generally utilize an inclusive participatory style, which comes as a result of socialization and were lauded for their ability to motivate others. According to Powell, personal motivations for men came from a competitive nature and driven by personal advancement, whereas women were more socially oriented towards trying to find a happy median for the overall good of the group.

Women have been stereotyped as rarely holding real power and as a result, have low self-confidence, impacting responses to their leadership from both subordinates and managers. Kanter (1977) reported women in leadership use an indirect method of influence based on their perception of having limited legitimate power. In order to garner the support needed to move the organization forward women are forced to lead differently than their male counterparts. Haslett, et al., (1992) declared women in leadership positions need to understand that the use of power is critical to their success. According to Gilligan (1993) and others; (Johnson, 1994; Powell, 1988; Tavis & Wade, 1984), observable leadership differences in men and women can be tied to

opportunity, organizational structure, power and socialization. Additionally, Shakeshaft (1989) outlined there were distinct differences in the way men and women reach and make decisions.

Women are more apt to follow communal goals and strategies, whereas men tend to prefer instrumental goals based on their individual interests, (Haslett, et al., 1992). Women are perceived to strive to smooth over stressful or negative situations rather than dealing with them head on in an attempt to gain and maintain support. This method can at times lead to a misperception of their true potential. Oppositely, men prefer the more direct approach when handling situations; sending the message they are decisive, responsive and problem solvers (Chase, 1995). This has led to the successful women leader having to transform them and take on the traits of their male competitor in order to advance in the male dominated world of educational administration.

### **Leadership Styles of Women Who Lead**

The perception of women in leadership has in turn created barriers to African American women. Scott (1983) claimed the perception of barriers for African American women who aspire to the level of school district superintendent, often present challenges to the successful completion of ones work responsibility within the social context of the role. Consequently, women, particularly African American women have limited access to power and positions based on how their management styles are perceived and received by others (Brown & Klein, 1982). Similarly, Bass (1996), pointed out women are expected to be more submissive than men if they expect to garner and keep the job of superintendent. When too much resistance is felt, women encounter indignities that they must endure at the risk of possibly losing their job. The perception of barriers held by women in leadership can lead to decision making they do not



believe to be the best fit for the organization while it may be the will of the community and Board.

Female leaders who exhibited a task-oriented style of leadership are often associated with being masculine and thus received negative reactions from peers and subordinates. The constant perceived need to dodge being pulled into the fray caused task-oriented women to receive a low response rate from subordinates or at times being called something other than their name. Work place norm for women in leadership centered on the continual endurance of gender-biased expectations and task-oriented behaviors which often were in conflict with each other (Haslett, et al., 1992). However, those women in leadership positions who exhibited nurturing behaviors were judged as not being a good match for the district or the community. McBroom (1998) reported the more women gain power, the more they lose their feminine identity.

The perception of women who lead has changes as women have tried to conform to societal norms. In the 1995 study by Bell, it was noted; women superintendents shaped their consciousness of gender perception and how they should lead to the extent they became defeminized. Bell went on to state the pressure for women who aspired to positions of leadership to disassociate themselves from other women arose from an inherent need to prove they were different from the negative stereotypes that seemed to follow them. Henning and Jardin (1977) reported women in top positions of leadership took on a more widely accepted traditional leadership style aligned to that of males in similar leadership positions. Amedy (1999) expressed the belief that women who sit in the seat of superintendent take on the look of being tough, rude, and callous in an effort to gain respect and acceptance of students, staff and community.

In summary, research exists that is focused on gender and leadership concept differences between men and women. The research data indicated that females view the world differently

from their male colleagues (Bell, 1995). Hutton and Gougeon (1993) noted women need their own knowledge base in order to be considered as viable candidates for the position of superintendent when judged alongside the more traditional knowledge base.

### **Women and the Superintendency**

Female aspirants to leadership position of public school district superintendents need to be strategic in their plans for advancement. Their plans must include strategic steps in professional networking, planning for the demands of family responsibilities, adapting a flexible attitude towards relocation when the available position is in another district, and establishing one's stable career path. Researchers in a study of women public school superintendents in Ohio focused on leadership styles found female superintendents possessed certain essential leadership strengths and behaviors in common( Amedy, 1999; Brunner, 2000; and Shakeshaft, 1988).

Wickham (2007) also studied the female superintendents in California and their perceived barriers and challenges as they moved towards the superintendency and noted a discrepancy with the number of females in the California superintendency. The proportion of female superintendents was just 23% while females were about 75% of all educators in the school districts of California. In terms of collected barriers and successful strategies to the superintendency applied by female administrators, these included the demands of family, inability to relocate, and exclusion from the male dominated superintendent networks.

Wickham, (2007) reported the successful strategies drawn by the respondents included increasing visibility in educational professional circles, pursuing a doctorate degree, developing and sticking to a plan of action, preparing a very comprehensive resume, developing a strong concept of self, securing one's family support, managing with one's coping mechanisms, strategically preparing for the district level experience, having the flexibility to relocate, and

pushing for the opportunities to advance within the given school district structure/organization. Wickham (2007) confirmed the importance of university programs that fully prepared the female aspirants to prevail against preconceived barriers or challenges which they could face when attempting to secure the leadership position of school superintendency. It is also interesting to note that Wickham suggested comparing the barriers between male and female superintendent aspirants and/or assessing the perceived barriers of minority superintendents as another specific topic for research consideration.

### **African American Women and the Superintendency**

There was no clear documentation regarding African American women superintendents before 1956. The opportunities for African American women to become superintendents before 1956 were limited (Revere, 1987). Collier-Thomas (1987) declared the sparse and concentrated representation of African American superintendents was centered in mainly southern states which catered to an African American population. Revere (1987) reported Velma Dolphin Ashley, superintendent in Boley, Oklahoma (1944–1956), as probably the first African American woman to become superintendent in the United States. Revere noted the proportion of the female, African American superintendents had risen to the count of three with additional African Americans successfully attaining the position of superintendents by the 1970's. In 1982, there were 11 African American women school superintendents, 15 in 1983, 29 in 1984, and 29 in 1985 (Revere, 1985).

The history of African American females in education can be traced from the role of teacher to administrator and finally to the superintendency. Coleman (2004) presented data to the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) which confirmed an increase in the number of African American female superintendents. However, the increase in African

American female superintendents was not in proportion to the total increase of women in superintendent positions. Coleman, Collins, and Harrison-Williams (2004) reported at the NABSE conference in Dallas African American women represent 114 of the estimated 15,000 superintendents in the country (.099%). One state in particular, Mississippi has the largest share of African American female superintendents at 13; Illinois stands at second place, with 11 African American females serving as superintendents (NABSE, 2013). Only recently, have African American female superintendents been chronicled in studies surrounding the successful acquisition and retention of the position of the public school district superintendent (Blount, 1998; Glass, 1992; Brunner, 2005; Tallerico, 1999).

African American female superintendents often see themselves as role models encouraging other women who aspire to be superintendents through mentorships and internships. Johnson (2012) studied six African American female superintendents who worked as superintendents in at least two school districts. These superintendents were asked questions relative to perceived barriers and adversities faced in moving towards achieving the leadership position of superintendent. Johnson's study focused on the roles sexism and racism (or gender and race) played in attaining the superintendency.

The study's respondents stated that female superintendents worked to engage the local community and establish relationships with educational stakeholders. Women leaders who participated in the study shared the importance of support in developing their courage and the need in being consistent when establishing where they wanted to go. This entailed knowing themselves and being rooted in one's own values and ethics. The study showed that African American female superintendents had strong religious faith. Johnson (2012) reported female superintendents also had a strong familial love, support, and encouragement from family, friends,

and parents. The female superintendents who responded considered listening as a crucial aspect to their success. These women leaders further stressed the importance of intentionally giving back to the profession. Data supported the need for continual learning and desire to work harder while trying to maintain a balance between work and home, (Johnson, 2012).

The number of African American superintendents continues to fluctuate. Recent data shows that in most cases, Bruner (2005) reported African American women superintendents either resigned or are terminated early in their tenure. Therefore, any momentum attributed to the increased presence of the African American female to the ranks of superintendent can be countered by the resignations and terminations. Johnson (2012) reported Patterson and Kelleher's resiliency model provided a comprehensive paradigm to understand how female African American superintendents perceive their experiences as superintendents from a resiliency perspective. With reduced opportunities for African American women to access and attain the administrative position of superintendent coupled with continual challenges that come with the position, resiliency is critical to the success of a superintendent. Patterson and Kelleher modeled how African American female superintendents become resilient within the complicated context of gender and race/ethnicity (Johnson, 2012).

African American female superintendents are confronted with the same challenges as white female and male superintendents. However, as African American women these leaders must acknowledge and consider the crucial factors needed to understand and how to handle the challenges triggered by virtues of their race and gender. Successful women who know this attain and keep leadership positions and emerge from the experience resilient, stronger and better equipped to face even more consistent educational challenges.

## Path-Goal Leadership Theory

Path-Goal Leadership Theory (PGLT), also known as the path-goal theory of leader effectiveness or the path-goal model, developed by Robert House, an Ohio State University graduate, in 1971 and revised in 1996, is a leadership theory based on the premise that a leader's behavior is contingent to the satisfaction, motivation and performance of her or his subordinates. The path-goal model can be classified as a Transaction leadership theory. PGLT evolved from the work of Martin G. Evans in 1970 and the belief that particular behaviors (path) can lead to a particularly outcome (goal) as a result of ones motivations, empowerment, and satisfaction (House, 1996). Path-Goal Leadership Theory is most often used in research on women, African American and individuals with Disabilities.

The path-goal theory was also influenced by Victor Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory of Motivation: **Valence x Expectancy x Instrumentality = Motivation.**

- **Valence (Reward)** = the amount of desire for a goal (What is the reward?)
- **Expectancy (Performance)** = the strength of belief that work related effort will result in the completion of the task (How hard will I have to work to reach the goal?)
- **Instrumentality (Belief)** = the belief that the reward will be received once the task is completed (Will others notice the effort I put forth?)

For the study, the researcher utilized path-goal theory to identify achievement-oriented leader behaviors in the interviewees as a mean to inform African American female aspirants to the public school district superintendency of effective strategies to secure the position of superintendent. Strategies shared may prove beneficial to aspirants in addressing challenging goals, pushing them to perform at their highest level, and showing confidence in their ability to meet the expectations of the role of public school district superintendent.

## **Chapter 2 Summary**

What is known from the early history of education, indicates that women have always been perceived as the face of the educator; particularly, that of the classroom teacher. Whereas men were the first teachers, the female presence took over during the Industrial Revolution; but has not progressed beyond that until more recent times. Over time women began to seek opportunities outside of the classroom into the administrative realm at either the building or central office level. Those who dared to step out of traditional roles found they were met with ill-directed perceptions that more often than not were formulated and transmitted by those who believed in a male dominated culture. Others were met with barriers to advancement tied to gender and/ or racial bias. African American women and other women of color who sought advancement faced an even greater challenge as they not only had to compete against their male counterparts; but against White women who did not look like them as well. In spite of these challenges, many had to persevere to attain the position of public school district superintendent. This study is intended to address what we know about perception, challenges and barriers that impede the advancement of women to the position of school district superintendent and the successful strategies used to overcome them; as revealed by successful African American female superintendents.

### **Chapter 3 Methodology**

Leadership ability, gender role socialization, and approach to management can possibly lead to career advancement for men and women in any career. However, when women choose a career outside of the home, they encounter the challenge of managing career and home life (family, children, and spouse). Society has created norms and expectations for these roles with every woman having to navigate these roles.

The researcher's personal experience as an African American female public school district superintendent provided the impetus for this study. This study, an applied research project, focused on gender and racial issues surrounding women, especially African American women, in the male dominated profession of the public school district superintendency. The researcher hypothesized that there are perceived barriers related to the traditional beliefs regarding women in the prestigious role of public school district superintendent: these barriers hinder the female's acquisition of the superintendency. Whether real or perceived, these barriers create situations in leadership that are distinctly different for women as compared to men.

#### **Research Design**

##### **Narrative Inquiry**

This study explored the perceived barriers of African American female superintendents and the processes they endured to achieve their positions in the public school districts of Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. Kramp (2004) contended that narrative inquiry studies, which the researcher used to encourage female public school district superintendents to share their coping mechanisms regarding work pressures and the impact on their personal lives, provided valuable insights to female aspirants to the public school district superintendency. This study revealed significant insights into the reflections of



current African American female superintendents regarding role models, professional development, mentors and sponsorships, and leadership styles for a successful trajectory to the superintendency. Shared leadership experiences, whether similar or different, provided a model in the preparation for the position of public school district superintendent. The next generation of females who aspire to the public school district superintendency may find the results of this study beneficial.

The participants in this study answered survey questions and six individuals told their stories through responses to a semi-standardized interview as a part of narrative inquiry. The researcher determined that utilizing the semi-standardized interview was the appropriate method to utilize in this study, and that this method provided the flexibility to deviate from the schedule of questions if additional probing was required (Berg, 2007). The participants also shared their personal histories and experiences as related to the focal points of the research problem (Christian-Smith & Kellor, 1998). Within the context of this study, the interviewees' stories and their meanings interchanged with fellow interviewees and formed patterns which emerged as themes (Fine, 2009; Kramp, 2004). According to Kramp (2004), Aristotle defined a narrative as "having a distinct beginning, middle, and end" (p. 109). Also, the character in a narrative (i.e., participant) is working towards attaining a goal (i.e., being a female superintendent) (Kramp, 2004). Because the researcher used the narrative inquiry methodology with a semi-standardized interview, there was no need to utilize a large sample size as part of the research, but more realistic to employ a small number of interviews (Christian-Smith & Kellor, 1998).

The narrative is an analysis of a unit of data or information within an inquiry. The researcher used the narrative to contextualize the story in a narrative inquiry setting. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative way of obtaining the information to make the methodology as precise as

possible, and the study results and conclusions reliable (Christian-Smith & Kellor, 1998; Kramp 2004).

The collected data consisted of the common demographic profiles of the said states' female superintendents. This study drew conclusions from survey and interview data to determine the perceived barriers and strategies of females who have acquired the position of public school district superintendency, in the afore-mentioned states. Additionally, this study consisted of an analysis of mobility patterns, required professional development, and training for those who aspire to the public school district superintendency. Lastly, this study drew conclusions from the survey and interview data to compare and contrast specific gender and racial/ethnic elements or issues, particularly for African American female aspirants.

Narrative inquiry is utilized as the methodology for this study. This study used a non-experimental-descriptive research design – narrative (Wickham, 2007). My study consisted of a sample of African American female superintendents in the eight afore-mentioned states at one point in time in the years of 2014-2015. Narrative inquiry provided a research strategy to understand an event or a phenomenon for this study. This model falls under the umbrella of qualitative methodology as it renders itself to gathering the unique experiences of the subjects which may have an inter relationship with each other or within the sampled group. The participants' responses to the researcher's questions may provide insight as to how racial/ethnic and gender variables work in a contemporary educational setting (Kramp, 2004).

Compared with the quantitative method of research, narrative inquiry is special because it is not a rigidly designed research strategy used to obtain a scientific answer to a research problem. The outcomes of which include an interpretation of a research problem, the access of meaning's from the sampled research, and research results. The narrative inquiry approach

provided insight into “the world of lived experiences from the point of view of those lived it” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). This approach was consistent with the construction of the social world characterized by the interactions between the researcher and the participants (Mingers, 2001). The researcher’s interpretation played a key role in the narrative inquiry which brought “subjectivity backed with quality arguments rather than statistical exactness” (Garcia & Quek, 1997, p. 459).

The outcome of a narrative inquiry can be very important in exploring a deeper dimension of the research problem and lead to the next level of required research. Qualitative results are as significant as quantitative results. Kramp and Humphreys (1995) suggested a narrative is a “vital human activity that structures experience and supplies it meaning” (p. 10). This mode of inquiry is distinct because it is a process and an outcome. Hence, a narrative inquiry is a discourse (i.e., form of the data obtained) and a method by which a researcher collates information (Kramp & Humphreys, 1995). In this type of a qualitative inquiry, there are no objective answers. My study examined and determined the social expectations, truthful motives, and participants’ perceptions of racial and gender biases that may work against women who aspire to the public school district superintendency.

In this narrative inquiry, the researcher selected the valuable contexts. Kramp (2004) defined valuable context as the characteristic that renders meaning to the events narrated in the participants’ story. Time and place are important contextual values that position a story in its unique framework. Since valuable context is very critical to understanding meaning, the researcher’s questions sought to elicit interviewees’ responses that reflected the participants’ experiences related to their ascent to the public school district superintendency.

For this study, the researcher concentrated on the interviewees' narratives and found meaning and interrelationships which resulted in the identification of themes. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) identified the researcher as an essential instrument in all studies, hence, the job of the researcher is to discern from the data the information that will help lead to formation of theoretical concepts that can be further investigated (Christian-Smith & Kellor, 1998). According to Fine (2009), the goal of a narrative inquiry is not to present each narrative separately or generalize about particular populations. Rather, it is intended to highlight characteristics among a number of cases so as to link them to a greater theoretical constructs (themes). Johnson (2012) asserted the lack of knowledge regarding studies of African American female superintendents who mentor African American female aspirants to the public school district superintendency.

### **Research Questions**

The study answered the four research questions:

1. What barriers of upward mobility to the public school district superintendency do female administrators perceive to exist within their state and/or school district?
2. How are these perceived barriers related to their racial, ethnic, and gender background?
3. What career progression (i.e., patterns of promotion, job title, gender of supervisor, and length of tenure) is relevant to the trajectory to the superintendency for African American female aspirants?
4. What do current African American female superintendents perceive to be critical professional development for aspiring African American female administrators?

The study was limited to a small sample group of female, African American superintendents using a narrative inquiry method. The stories gathered from the participants will be evaluated for common themes among the female superintendents' stories (Fine, 2009). The main thesis of this study was that each African American female superintendent participant would have an extraordinary narrative; the researcher would determine common themes within the participants' stories. The common themes may lead to a better understanding of theories on gender, especially in the domain of professional leadership in the educational arena (Kramp, 2004).

### **Sample for the Study**

The researcher developed a survey in Survey Monkey to facilitate contact with the female superintendents within Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. The researcher identified female superintendents in the above mentioned states and sent an electronic email which requested their participation in a survey and response to the twenty-four (24) survey questions. The researcher then identified African American female superintendents who met the criteria of having been employed as a public school district superintendent for at least two years or more from the returned surveys. The researcher surmised the survey results and findings held potential significant promise for African American female aspirants to the public school district superintendency.

The researcher requested a follow-up interview with identified African American female respondents. The researcher attempted to control the setting (place of the interview) by suggesting that interviews take place in person. Instead, interviewees (5) chose to engage the researcher via telephone. As a result the researcher lost the opportunity to make personal behavioral observations in 5 of the 6 interviews conducted.

The researcher identified the qualifying survey respondents with directories from state departments of education for the afore-mentioned states and the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE). The NABSE directory ensured maximum access to African American female superintendents. The organization contained the most comprehensive data base of African American superintendents for the United States, Canada, and the Virgin Islands. The NABSE directory further supported the premise of the underrepresentation of African American females in the public school district superintendency. NABSE data reported, as of 2007, female African American superintendents constituted less than 1% of all the superintendents in the United States. This research study considered African American female public school district superintendents in the states of Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Tennessee, as a qualifying characteristic for inclusion.

The researcher sought to establish a collaborative relationship with the African American survey respondents who agreed to be interviewees. The interviewees shared their narrative and the researcher used semi-standardized interview questions aligned to the research questions and surveys to focus and add a framework to the process, which was necessary to keep the direction of the narrative and its content on-point. The interviewees described events and personal experiences encountered in their journey to the superintendency.

In the introduction to the interviews, the researcher shared important specifics regarding the purpose of the study and the interviewees' significance to that purpose. Reflections of current African American female superintendents may prove beneficial to African American females who aspire to be public school district superintendents. Kramp (2004) argued reflections on past experiences serve to help study participants respond to questions regarding challenges

and pressures in an individual's career trajectory for example; lessons learned, process encountered access to professional development, and interaction with like-minded individuals.

### **Informed Consent**

The researcher shared, discussed, and formalized ethical considerations with the respondents as a part of the informed consent process. The researcher reviewed the purpose of the study and provided an informed consent form to ensure the respondents understood the voluntary nature of the study, their rights, and protections.

There were no anticipated risks associated with this study. There may be some risk of identity disclosure. The researcher assigned an unidentifiable number to survey respondents. The researcher reassigned numbers to interviewees. Interviewees permitted the researcher to record the interview and allow for transcription. Permission to record became a part of the consent agreement. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and conducted in a private setting of the participant's choice, via telephone, and electronically.

### **Confidentiality**

The researcher assigned an anonymous number to each participant to maintain confidentiality. Each interviewee received a copy of their survey and interview transcript for their clarification, deletions, or additions. All pertinent data to the study is secured in a locked cabinet at the researcher's residence and on a password-protected computer. No public access will be allowed to the study data. The researcher plans to store all of this study's data for three years. After that time, the researcher plans to destroy the material.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher utilized qualitative grounded data collection strategies. Grounded data collection strategies is important as theoretical sampling enables the researcher to select subjects

that maximize potential to discover as many dimensions and conditions related to the phenomenon as possible (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The initial research questions are outlined below:

1. What barriers to upward mobility to the public school district superintendency do female administrators perceive to exist within their state and/or school district?
2. How are these perceived barriers related to their race/ethnic, and gender background?
3. What career progression (i.e., patterns of promotion, job title, gender of supervisor, and length of tenure) is relevant to the route to superintendency for African American female aspirants?
4. What do current African American female superintendents perceive to be critical professional development needs for aspiring African American female administrators?

Surveys and semi-standardized interviews served as the primary sources of data collection. The researcher has extensive experience as a public school district superintendent and is therefore knowledgeable in the area of behavioral based interviewing and observation. The researcher believed it important to capture all communication and reactions from the interviewees. However, only one interviewee agreed to a face-to-face interview which prevented the researcher from observing facial expressions, mannerisms, and non-verbal communication in the interviewees' natural/preferred setting. But the researcher's experience detected voice intonation and emotion during the telephone interviews. During the semi-standardized interview, the researcher facilitated dialogue with the interviewees. This approach enabled the researcher to sensitively or directly broach the issues of race and gender.



The researcher is currently employed as a public school district superintendent in a suburban Midwestern metropolitan area. The researcher posed questions to prompt interviewees to describe their perspectives regarding the topic. The researcher intentionally strived to facilitate the schedule of questions and probing questions in a non-biased manner. The individual interviews were taped using a digital audio recorder. For this study, the researcher characterized field notes as the notes taken during the interviews.

In the interviews, the researcher tended to deviate from the order of the schedule of questions and often began interviews with questions tailored to the following six categories:

1. Interviewee Profile
2. Acquisition of the First Superintendency
3. Successful Strategies as a Female Superintendent
4. Perceived Barriers and Challenges in Quest for Superintendency
5. Role of Gender and Race
6. Patterns of Mobility

Starting with Interviewee #1, the interview commenced at approximately 5pm, which was the agreed upon time and conducted via the telephone while the interviewee commuted between the office and home. The noise level in the vehicle did not alter the interviewee's focus. Interviewee #1 often detailed experiences that caused the researcher to skip/not need to ask the scheduled question. At times the researcher injected into the dialogue in order to transition to the next category and keep the interview progressing. The interview lasted for approximately an hour.

The second interview conducted with Interviewee #2 started at 8am on a Monday morning in the interviewee's office via the telephone. The researcher distinguished soft music

playing in the background during the interview. Based on voice inflection, the researcher perceived Interviewee #2 as calm, at ease, and probably smiling during the interview.

Interviewee #2, at the time of the interview shared he involvement with a major writing project, had to be redirected to the topic by the researcher on several occasions.

The third interview took place on a Sunday afternoon at the scheduled time of 5:00pm via Interviewee #3's cellular telephone. Interviewee#3 shared she had just returned home from her district's district-wide orchestra concert. After a brief conversation regarding Interviewee #3's district, the researcher started the interview. During the interview on several occasions, Interviewee #3 paused to address personal needs within her home (home phone, husband, pet). Upon resumption of the interview, the interviewee apologized and inquired where the interview should resume. At the conclusion of the interview, Interviewee #3 related she hoped she had been the researcher's best interview.

The fourth interview, scheduled to take place via telephone during Interviewee #4's lunch break failed to take place as scheduled due to an emergency in Interviewee's school district. Interviewee #4 quickly rescheduled the interview for the following day at 3:30pm. The researcher and interviewee quickly established a rapport and commenced the interview which concluded an hour and five minutes later. During the researcher's dialogue with the interviewee, the interviewee posed the same questions asked of her to the researcher in an effort to ascertain the researcher's status, profile, and opinions.

The fifth interview took place as scheduled on February 25, 2015 in San Diego, California in the lobby of a convention hotel. Interviewee #5 and the researcher attended the national conference for the American Association of School Administrators and agreed to conduct the interview while there. The interview took place in the south lobby of the hotel

which provided an atmosphere without any distractions. Interviewee #5 appeared poised, confident, and eager to talk about her experiences in public school administration and ultimately in her role as superintendent. Throughout the interview, Interviewee #5 chuckled and smiled when she recalled events/experiences in response to the researcher's questions. At the conclusion of the interview, Interviewee #5 wished the researcher luck in concluding and finalizing this study.

Interview six was the most difficult to bring to fruition in comparison to the other interviews. Interviewee #6 rescheduled the interview four times prior to the interview actually taking place on Monday, March 2, 2015; once due to a work emergency, once due to a personal emergency, and twice due to a scheduling conflict. The researcher actively interacted well with Interviewee #6's administrative assistant throughout the scheduling process.

### **Reliability**

The internal reliability of the study was assured with the audio taped interviews that captured verbatim participant responses to the non-standard interview questions, and direct quotes from the participants in the study (Merriam, 1998). Utilizing a constructivist/interpretive perspective, the reliability of this study was established with several strategies including member checking, triangulation, peer review, reflexivity, and trustworthiness (Katz, 2004).

### **Survey Questions**

The survey consisted of twenty-four questions:

1. Describe your Race/Ethnicity. (White, Black/African American, Hispanic, Native American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Multi Race)
2. In what state are you currently a superintendent?

3. Years of experience in education?
4. Years of administrative experience including superintendency?
5. Is this your first superintendency? (Yes, No. If no, indicate the number of superintendent positions held.)
6. How long have you been in your current position?
7. Were you an \_\_\_\_ internal or \_\_\_\_\_ external candidate?
8. How were you made aware of the position? (Search Firm, Website, Print/Broadcast Media, Word of Mouth, Mentor, Colleague, Other)
9. Do/Did you have a mentor that assisted you along your journey to acquiring the position of school district superintendent?
10. What age were you when you attained your first administrative position?
11. What age were you when you attained your first position as superintendent?
12. Describe your career trajectory to the position of superintendent. Check all that apply. (Teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal, Chief Academic Officer, Director of Instruction, Assistant Superintendent, Other)
13. What barriers and challenges did you encounter on the road to the superintendency?
14. Do you perceive these barriers/challenges to be associated to your gender and/or race? If so, please explain.
15. What barriers and challenges exist in your role as superintendent?
16. What is/was the race of your predecessor?
17. What is/was the gender of your predecessor?
18. How many years was she or he superintendent?

19. Describe the surrounding community where your district is located. (Rural, Urban, Suburban)
20. What is your student enrollment? ( 1-500, 501 – 1000, 1001 – 5000, 501 – 10,000, 10,000 or more)
21. What is your student demographic?
22. What is the economic status of your district/community?
23. Is your Board of Education elected or appointed?
24. What is the makeup of your Board of Education? (Number, Race, and Gender)

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher analyzed the narrative data within the demographic context of the interviewee's district. Transcriptions of interviews from the recorded tapes identified several themes from the interviewees and themes emerged from cross-referencing survey respondents' data. The different levels of the constant comparative analysis process included the following: (1) organizing the data – reading and rereading the transcripts so that the researcher became familiar with the narrative supplied through the interviews; (2) gathering categories, themes, and patterns, or identifying the crucial themes, recurring ideas, systems, and patterns of beliefs which related to the participating female superintendents, their educational and/or contextual settings; (3) encoding the data to facilitate the assessment of the information as categorized into identified themes – encoding the data and creating a visual chart to graphically assess the distinct themes from the data; (4) testing emergent understandings – questioning the obtained data and information to gain a better comprehensive knowledge of whether it addressed the research problems and allowed further investigation as to its contexts; (5) researching for subsequent and alternative explanations – or searching for extra chances of utilizing the narrative to draw out

new meanings; and (6) writing the report. Constant and continuous comparative analysis “is a method of choice when the researcher intends to answer general or overarching questions of the narrative data” (Baptiste, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 2009; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This type of analysis contributed to the systematic clarification of the information in this study.

The researcher explored each narrative through the lens of African American female public school district superintendents. The survey protocol, used by the researcher, guided each interviewee’s narrative and interview regarding their perception of barriers and challenges tied to race and gender during their careers as a school administrator and the acquisition of the position of public school district superintendent.

The researcher reviewed the transcripts to glean an understanding of each female superintendent’s story and their experiences. The researcher identified themes linked to the perceived challenges and barriers of race and gender which emerged from listening to the interviewees. Notes, taken during the interviews, related to categories associated with the following topics: educational assets/strengths, weaknesses, perceived barriers and challenges, successful strategies to position acquisition, and motivators for success. Data categories helped the researcher to analyze responses within and across each interview.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

The researcher designed questions to allow the African American female superintendents an opportunity to share subjective information that may add to the knowledge reflected in the review of literature regarding the underrepresentation of African American females in the public school district superintendency. The research questions encouraged interviewees to share their particular thoughts by prompting them to refer to their personal experiences through the use of

semi-standardized interviews. This method, narrative inquiry, provided the vehicle to uncover valuable insights by probing the thoughts of current African American female public school district superintendents to assist African American female aspirants. The researcher realized early in the research process that quantitative data, gleaned from the survey responses, lacked the ability to inform the researcher with substantive data for this study to determine the descriptive qualities required to enhance the opportunities for African American female spirants to the public school district superintendency.

## **Chapter 4 Findings**

This chapter features the summation of the survey respondents and interviewees' responses and insights into their trajectory and ascent to the public school district superintendency. The researcher identified themes gleaned from interviewees' responses and correlated those themes to theories and findings supported in the review of literature. Significant life events, which may have implications on racial, ethnic, and gender issues, are vital in addressing the research questions. Equally important are the study's findings which provided a distinct voice for the participants' experiences.

The survey questions included seven demographic questions. Their common profiles include the following: African American or White female, between the ages of 38 and 61 years old when the first superintendency was attained. This finding evidenced the literature which says that women are usually older and have been in education longer before acquiring their first administrative position. Shakeshaft et al., (2007) reported women who aspire for educational leadership equity are on an uphill climb against time and position attainment.

### **Survey Responses**

The researcher reviewed the directories from state departments of education in the seven contiguous states surrounding Missouri (Illinois, Kansas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Iowa, Nebraska, and Oklahoma), and selected the names of females along with names that were considered gender neutral (i.e., Kim, Lee, and initials). The researcher submitted a survey via email to 150 identified female superintendents in the aforementioned states included in the study. The researcher had determined that the sample size of 150 encompassed 36 African American female public school district superintendents. In comparison, the National Alliance of Black School



Educators, 2014-2015 Directory of African American Superintendents, indicated there were a total of 145 African American female public school district superintendents in the United States.

Over a three-week period, 118 participants returned surveys which yielded descriptive statistics for the researcher to review. Of the 118 survey respondents, the researcher determined receipt from 29 African American female public school district superintendents (80.5% of identified African American superintendents in the states included in the study). Of the 29 African American survey respondents, 26 directed K—12 public school districts, with two serving as superintendent of high school only districts, and one in a collaborative special education district. These twenty-six African American female superintendents met the criteria to be interviewed for the study; serving as a public school district superintendent of schools for at least two years. Of the 29 African American survey respondents, only nine (30.9%) of those who met the criteria, agreed to a follow up interview, with one later declining due to personal reasons. The researcher has also noted survey data revealed 78.5% of the survey respondents serve in their first superintendency. This fact will be further explored with the interviewees.

The majority of the African American female survey respondents serve in metropolitan districts, where as White survey respondents serve in rural districts. Survey results indicated that irrespective of the district's size and geographic location, 96% of the respondents serve as superintendents in economically and racially diverse communities. However, while many of the interviewees indicated experiencing similar challenges, the connection to gender and race were not always easily identifiable. In a recent study, Johnson (2012) confirmed the majority of African American female superintendents tend to acquire positions in school districts that are diverse both economically and racially.

One survey respondent actually acquired the position of superintendent at the age of 25 years. Many survey respondents indicated they held doctoral degrees even though the survey did not request this information. The average years in education for African American survey respondents were 34 years or more. Based on geographic location, 21.43% of the survey respondents were from Iowa, 21.43% from Missouri, 17.86% between Nebraska and Oklahoma, 14.29% from Arkansas, 14.29% from Tennessee, 10.71% from Illinois, and 0% in Kansas. Illinois has the highest number of African American female public school superintendents (20) than any of the other states in the study.

Superintendents are more likely to be externally selected or appointed than internally promoted while men are twice more likely to be appointed from the outside (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). For this study, 53.57% of survey respondents were internal candidates for the superintendency compared to 46.43% as external candidates. Eight, approximately 27.5% of the African American survey respondents, reported they were hired using search firms. The demographic data showed the last position held by the majority of survey respondents prior to the superintendency was assistant superintendent in a public school district. One survey respondent served as a high school principal before being a superintendent and now serves as superintendent of a high school only district. A study by Wolverton and Macdonald (2001) confirmed recruitment and hiring of male officials and administrators as one of the barriers in the mobility of female aspirants to administrative leadership and further substantiated gender disparity in the superintendency.

### **Interview Responses**

Of the eight superintendents who agreed to complete an interview, only six (20.65%) completed interviews. It was established earlier, the number of African American female

superintendents meeting the criteria would be relatively low. It was expected that the sample for the study would be small based on race and gender and those who have served as public school district superintendent for two or more years. It is also common in studies such as narrative inquiry that only 50% of the initially determined sample size is able to participate due to limited time which was inevitable based on current roles and responsibilities of leading a school district, administrative work load, and the small sample size (Wickham, 2007). Due to the relatively small sample size of African American female superintendents in the eight states identified for this study, an unidentifiable number was assigned to each of the participants on the surveys and interviews to protect their identity. Information on marital status, district name, religious preference, academic attainment, and demographic was not requested as a part of this study as an additional measure to further protect participants from being identified.

Interviewees attested that they are often perceived as being capable of educating students of low socioeconomic status (SES), managing limited resources, and are knowledgeable of strategies to close the achievement gap, by virtue of the color of their skin. They believed these perceptions played a significant part in the acquisition of their current and or past placement as a public school district superintendent. African American school leaders often acquire the superintendency in medium to larger urban districts where they manage the daily challenges of underfunding, limited resources, non-certificated faculty, poverty, and poor student performance (Johnson, 2012). However, while many of the interviewees indicated experiencing similar challenges, the connection to gender and race were not always easily identifiable.

Each of the African American female superintendents participating in the study shared that while they received and felt support from their immediate family, they also indicated a strain existed due to extended work hours and the expectation that they be on 24 hour call. Four of the

six interviewees injected they believed their strong spiritual belief gave them a sense of calm and balance when faced with the challenges associated with acquiring and keeping the superintendency. Myrdal (1944) contended African Americans were intensely more religious than their White counterparts; a finding supported by one of this study's themes.

One hundred percent of the interviewees indicated their membership and participation in professional as well as community organizations facilitated their interaction with other female leaders. They further attested these other female leaders were generally not African American; however this interaction was an opportunity to grow professionally. Each of the interviewees reported they welcomed opportunities to mentor aspiring superintendent candidates as a benefit to their professional career. Johnson's (2012) study reported service on various local and national boards proved beneficial to a female's resiliency in the superintendency. When asked follow-up questions about resiliency and a time when they had to be resilient, 4 of the 6 interviewees enthusiastically shared an experience. Based on the situations shared, there was a common thread tied to the expectations that as female superintendents they were expected to have all the answers (i.e., academic achievement, tax levy, bond issue, fund balance, unannounced, and communicated events) and when they did not have control of events, their constituents frowned upon it.

Two interviewees stated they thought about seeking out search firms in the attempt to acquire a position as superintendent, but they found it to be limiting. They acknowledged the search firms are helpful in identifying a possible district match. This data reinforces the literature indicating firms may be beneficial in assisting women seeking advancement in educational administration. Johnson (2012) claimed search firms have the ability to orient Boards of Education about the level of experience and qualifications of potential African American female

aspirants through appropriate channeling and strategic relations. One of the six interviewees is currently in her third superintendency, while four out of the six are in their first superintendency.

### **Responses to Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived barriers of African American female superintendents and the process they have gone through to achieve their positions and strategies used to attain the highly sought position of public school district superintendent. Those who aspire to ascend to the public school superintendency will learn from the experiences and insights of current African American female superintendents. The findings that follow are the collective findings garnered from the six participating African American females serving as public school superintendents in the states of Missouri, Illinois, Kansas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Iowa, Nebraska, and Oklahoma in a response to the four research questions.

#### **Research Question No. 1**

What barriers of upward mobility to the public school district superintendency do female administrators perceive to exist within their state and/or school district?

The six interviewees acknowledged many challenges, barriers, pressures, and ordeals associated with their quest to attain the position of school district superintendent. The interviewees also reported having to face several adversities and roadblocks. As evidence of these challenges, during the interviews, Interviewees #1 and #5 related having to postpone and reschedule the interviews in order to handle new or instant emergencies and problems which they actually needed to attend to. All six interviewees also showed very tight schedules, therefore, two of the interviews were conducted electronically, three were conducted via telephone on weekends, and one was conducted in person while the researcher and interviewee were in attendance at the American Association of School Administrators Conference.

It was noted the interviewees varied in responses related to perceived barriers and leadership experiences in their advancement to the superintendency. The shared experiences, challenges and barriers can be broadly classified as follows: family related demands and issues, validation from the profession, the ability or inability to relocate, confidence in being a good school administrator, role socializations in relation to male dominion within superintendent circles, uneven career paths, the challenge of competition with males for the position, lack of male superintendent mentor or sponsor, perceived gender bias in the screening process of their applications, and other gender and racial related issues.

Other perceived barriers include being an outsider to the ‘good old boys network’ (Network) lack of political skills and maneuvering when it comes to attaining the highly sought after superintendency, the lack of motivation and support from the female colleagues (as compared to how the males boost their co gender aspirants), gender discrimination, the belief that females are not deserving, and shying away from the superintendency’s selection process. Five interviewees gave credit to the values of family support and their personal friends. These strong ties helped them to manage and sometimes overcome the perceived barriers and challenges.

Interviewees #1 and # 2 in particular made statements about the Network in their shared responses. They categorized Network as the male network that still seems to dominate even in cases when they really do not exist. Another barrier identified in the Network as related to search firms which can also be made up of the Network. Interviewee #2 further stated Boards of education who question if female administrators are strong enough to manage the job of superintendent can be reflective of the ‘good old boy’ thinking.

The problem is that most of these search firms are still led by White, American males who are between 50 to 80 years old. Instead of focusing on the characteristics and experience of an aspirant for various positions, they look for social and political networks and their own colleagues. They often choose candidates who are not political laden. In my own point of view, I think that the search firm is a kind of a business racket, an expensive yet unnecessary scheme for most school district candidates. I feel they are very influential and use this influence on Board of Education in the selection of viable candidates to the position of school superintendent an outcome. And it is always the same group of people whom they endorse. The sad thing is that search agencies tend to designate women into a less influential herd of aspirants (Interviewee # 6).

The consensus of Interviewees #1, #2, and #6 was with the new demands of the education today and the need to ensure that all students are college and career ready for this age of technological information, a new breed of school administrators is demanded. Search firms need to reach outside their stable and the same set of folks they rotate in and out and try something new.

Two African American female superintendents, Interviewee #4 and #5, believed their lack of business and finance experience was perceived as a barrier while their experience in curriculum and instruction was seen as an asset. Two female superintendents also pointed out how physical appearance is deemed as important and how it has become a barrier for them. Interviewees #1 and #6 noted some stereotypes include:

1. If the female candidates are pretty, they are not intelligent.
2. If the female candidates are heavy, they won't have the stamina for the job.
3. If female candidates have young children, they won't and can't commit to the time involved to be superintendent.

Four of the six African American female superintendents specifically cited barriers linked to their race: racially dominated, male society, being a minority is an influential factor in one's successful acquisition of administrative positions especially the superintendency. The majority of the survey respondents and those interviewed believed race added more barriers to their aspirations and their career trajectory to the superintendency. As an ethnic minority, they perceive that their color and their gender add up to more problems or barriers than for their White female, Black male or White male counterparts. One of the survey respondents addressed racial and gender bias as:

I have experienced more racial challenges in my path. I have had to be firm in my stance regarding decisions I have made and continue to make. I notice that my Caucasian counterparts are not questioned nor scrutinized nearly as much. I have also experienced sexism. It is very interesting that men don't believe women can be as if not more intelligent than they are. I have had to share my knowledge and experience along the way to assist my male counterparts in understanding that we deserve administrative roles as much as they do. In addition, I have had to demand respect throughout my career; mainly because I have been a young administrator, but in some instances it has been my race and gender. I am blessed to be where I am and dedicated to mentoring others along this path as I have been mentored.

It is interesting to note that the majority (five of six) of the interviewees were more inclined to share their experiences and their success strategies but reluctant to acknowledge racial and gender barriers encountered along the way. They also expounded on the special means by which they navigated a successful path that ultimately lead them towards the superintendency.



For these African American women currently serving in the position of public school superintendent, the best preparatory plan to lead a public school district is to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills set. Collectively, respondents consider the successful path towards superintendency as: first becoming a teacher, second an assistant principal/ principal, third coordinator/director, and then assistant superintendent before seeking the superintendency. They indicated this trajectory; serves to better equip those who aspire to be superintendent with the necessary tools to address: 1.) student achievement, 2.) highly qualified staff, 3.) operations, 4.) curriculum/professional development, and 5.) finance.

Three participants (Interviewees #1, #5, and #6) indicated the lack of professional networks as a barrier towards position attainment. Hence, involvement in many networks and professional associations is an effective strategy. These Interviewees noted the importance of females who strive towards positions in educational administration seek and participate in networking opportunities. All interviewees stressed networking is crucial to position acquisition. The interviewees agreed successful aspiring superintendent candidates often consist of those individuals who enjoy networking and are associated with the right circles.

Interviewee #1 reported the significance of aspirants and current superintendents being visible, networked, and leading specific roles in local or community groups. Aspiring candidates to the superintendency must maintain professional networks and continue to be cultivated by the 'right people' (i.e., current superintendents, retired superintendents and board of education members). These are the people who will provide strategic and timely information about goals and goal attainment.

Interviewee #2 pointed out successful candidates deliberately find time to research; visit the district, schools, and community where they intend to apply. Others also have professional

consultants who work on their personal data, resumes, and prompt or coach them on excellent professional interview responses. In summary, Interviewee#2 shared:

Know yourself and assess your strengths and weaknesses. You must study your potential school district very well. One must be very ready and on point during interviews. By knowing the district, it includes knowing the people in the community and the personnel in the district. Lastly, female aspirants should work hard; contextualize their leadership styles, approach to work, and ethics as to how the school district works.

Interviewee #1 shared:

During the 1990's, the board of education for the school district where I worked indicated the district was not yet ready for a female to lead them and definitely not an African American female. I believe the opportunities for the advancement of female aspirants, African American, White or other, while better, is not much better today than during the 1990's. The demand for quality instruction, increased student performance, and quality leaders is on the rise. Regardless, in reality, it is still a stiff challenge to pursue and attain public school district superintendency. Even though I have successful superintendents as mentors, I still have a tough time climbing up the ladder of advancement. And search firms, well they still instantly approach males over females to serve as mentors to fledgling candidates.

### **Research Question No. 2**

How are these perceived barriers related to their racial, ethnic, and gender background?

While four of the six interviewees conceptualized their perceptions of barriers, challenges, and experiences the focus was more on the fact of being a woman rather than an African American. The other two interviewees were more receptive to the notion,

gender and race issues have always been, and will continue to be pervasive barriers to the superintendency for women. Interviewee #3 argued she believed since superintendency is a male dominated administrative position, the baseline is anchored on how men lead and how they think. The interviewee articulated any prior knowledge and experiences about the role of the superintendent is defined by the experiences of White males.

Collectively the interviewees do not view either concept as a hindrance or having any significant impact on when and how they secured the position as public school district superintendent.

According to Interviewee #4:

More females are now attaining higher positions in educational leadership and therefore are challenging the stereotyped and external role models of what administrative leaders in the educational setting should be and look like. I felt a personal bias for being an African American superintendent and for being a woman. It seemed as though I was not good enough for the job and some of my colleagues were overtly biased.

Interviewee # 6 grew up in a Black community and admitted she had a detached view of race and gender. She further said that it is not just a matter of acceptance but more of how one deals with the issues.

Interviewee #5 optimistically shared:

Women now enjoy privileged posts in most areas of social circles. To do so, however, they have to overcome the barriers of sex and race or at least be more resourceful or wiser in terms of getting what they want. I know the inequalities still persist, but changes are seen. You just have to make a conscious effort to not mind it at all and be committed to doing what needs to be done in spite of everything else.

Interviewee #3 took a similar stance and displayed a positive attitude towards race and gender biases. While she stated she sometimes feels insignificant and devalued because she is Black, she still proves her point in almost all the things she does. She does not feel victimized. She further stated:

School administrators who don't accept me because of the color of my skin or my gender haven't affected my self-worth at all. I know and I accept who I am and what I am and what I have accomplished. This means I have to segregate my personal and my professional life. I am attuned to my own personal development. No one can make me feel more or less than I really am. I am not also affected by how people perceive me. I don't get affected by them because I know who I am. I don't indulge them with it, but I have learned how to proceed from here and how to get where I want to go. My self-worth is not attached to my being Black or being a woman.

Interviewee #2 acknowledged that the inner circle of the male network exists within her district and community, as well as among her superintendent colleagues. She further stated how difficult it is for women to break through glass ceilings in district, local and national organizations where such networks exist. She opines:

My approach has been to remain as I am. I will not patronize people or play by their rules, whims or preferences. If they do not like me, then so be it. I will not change myself just because others dislike me. I speak for what I believe and for children. I will tackle the issues which I feel important to the education of the students and parents. Even when I know that there is a small circle to which I do not belong or will ever be part of, so what? It is always interesting to identify men who are attempting to manipulate

me, but I am not supposed to be intelligent enough to recognize the manipulation. I have become a master of this particular strategy.

Interviewee #6 shared the experience of her first central administrative position in a district where she was the only African American individual sitting at the leadership table. She said that her colleagues had certain gender and racial biases about her. She regrets that people labeled her because of certain ideas that they had about gender but more significantly about race. She stressed, she would just carry on with the work and duties she was charged to accomplish. She said:

I simply won't bother with the ignorance. My allegiance was to the superintendent who hired me. He is a white male, who was then and remains today as my mentor. Whether the others wanted to accept me and or acknowledge my work, did not matter to me.

Eventually, I blocked them all out.

### **Research Question No. 3**

What career progressions (i.e., patterns of promotion, job title, gender of supervisor, and length of tenure) are relevant to the trajectory to the superintendency for African American female aspirants?

The educational experiences of the interviewees range from being an instructional assistant/teacher to public school superintendent. The years of service in education of the interviewees falls into the 25 to 38 total years of experience. One respondent had 21 years of service in education and acknowledged moving forward to the superintendency rapidly.

According to all survey respondents, the most familiar career path or pattern of mobility is that of classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent of curriculum or human resources, then superintendent. Another usual direction is that of a secondary teacher

then secondary assistant principal then secondary principal then finally becoming a superintendent. None of the interviewees had held positions in business and finance, but all stressed the importance of seeking out professional development in finance.

Five of the interviewees agreed the mobility patterns for female superintendents vary. Mobility patterns experienced were comprised of several factors tied to race and gender related factors, career progression and promotion patterns, job title, length of tenure, and being in the right place at the right time. It was also evident to the interviewees that in order for female superintendents to move in their careers, a well-built network of mentors and sponsors are needed to act as their professional development counselor and guide.

Interviewee #4 mentioned there is real a need for gender equality in the workplace. She noted the increased number of women advancing through the high-rank positions within their organizations. At some point, female aspirants to the superintendency run head on into the glass ceiling. The upward mobility for female African American superintendents still falls below White female superintendents and even farther behind men. The patterns of mobility are influenced by different barriers experienced by female superintendents at different levels of the school organization. All interviewees expressed no concerns of race or gender bias/barriers that inhibited their ascent to the public school superintendency. See interview responses to research question #1 for evidence.

Four of the six interviewees acknowledged the different challenges faced by aspirants when they start the journey seeking toward higher career advancement. They all declared the reason behind this was the job of superintendent has been dominated by men. This impression was further supported by the vast majority of survey responses. This perceived barrier then requires aspirants to succumb and seek out mentor system for coaching and guidance.

Interviewee #2 indicated she looked to her mentors or a sponsor, someone who could and would not only support and mentor her, but also help to push her up through the administrative ranks.

According to Interviewee #2:

Even when African American female superintendents have succeeded on the career ladder, we still often face more barriers than our male colleagues. These barriers are put up by Board of Education, teachers, and male superintendent colleagues. In order for female aspirants to move upward and to be recognized as an important asset to a school organization, they must be smarter, stronger and must out-maneuver the male aspirants in their organization. The right mentor can help one to read, adjust, adapt and move forward through the game of administrative advancement.

According to Interviewee #5, women have trailed behind men in having professional networks which can link them with key decision makers in schools districts and boards of education. This gives an advantage edge to men in terms of work advancements. Interviewee #6 felt that at one point, she was deprived of promotion to a high level administrative position in the past based on her lack of a male related network.

Three of the interviewees also stressed being given opportunities that were not tied to either their race or gender. They shared their experiences as follows:

Interviewee #1

I have always had good backing from my family members. This backing and support did not change when I became superintendent. My mother and my sister also worked in the educational arena and I counted on their precious pieces of advice and moral support whenever I needed someone to rally behind me. My mother was once a board member and she gave me powerful support and sound strategies for success. Perhaps, it is also the

confidence I have found in them which pushed and inspired me to go and also achieve what they have achieved during their times. My sister gave me the grounding when it comes to racial biases and stereotypes as a result I was not once intimidated.

The same level of family support was also felt by Interview participant #3, who shared:

I am thankful that I have a very closely knitted family. We enjoy a strong bonding. Both my mother and my aunt were teachers. They were my role models on what to do as well as not do. They were not bogged down by being Black and/or being inferior to their male counterparts. I never knew to think of being African American as a disadvantage nor was I raised to do so. I also came from a middle level economic background where race and gender are not defining elements of my personality and dreams. I also grew out from a community which embraces feminism. I am a bold advocate of women and most importantly women of color. I also have strong male influences from being raised in a two parent home with male siblings. I guess you could say I have a more balanced view of the sexes. I don't have any stereotypical notions of both male and female.

Interviewee #4 echoed the following:

I have been educated with a strong view of equality and that I can be whatever I want to become. All I remember is my mother stressing the importance of getting a good education so that I could take care of myself. She often told me, as a Black female I would always have to work harder. While, the issues of race and gender were always there I learned to use them to affirm my capabilities and my ability to accomplish my dreams. I did not view the position of the superintendency as highly coveted or



something which I could not attain because I believed that if I just focused all my energies into it, I would certainly win.

#### **Research Question No. 4**

What do current African American female superintendents perceive to be critical professional development for aspiring African American female administrators seeking the superintendency?

All of the participants noted that educational success and long tenure are the main considerations of women who aspire to be public school superintendents. Interviewees identified critical pre-service and professional development for females seeking the superintendency. Interviewee #1 said:

In a strong contrast with private business, in education the most qualified and educated individuals are not always the ones who attain the high level positions. As a result, trying to sort out your way through the career ladder and achieve positive outcomes required more creativity. The need to know finance would have truly been beneficial to my advancement. Anyone aspiring to the superintendency would be well served to engage in professional development centered on finance.

Additionally, the interviewees suggested the following:

- Superintendent preparation programs wherein addition to standard administrative courses should include more crucial topics, including racism, classism, gender identity, and social justice.
- Existing support networks for aspiring female superintendents must be widened, accessed and participated in.

- Association and connections with educational leaders in order to garner support of others with similar principles, experiences and values, is important in helping aspirants to superintendency believe in themselves and find the needed extra support.
- Professional networking is crucial for aspirants as they establish their own support system.
- Active participation in professional organizations for female superintendents serves as an asset for insight as well as advancement.
- All superintendents should join and be active in professional organizations at the local, state, and national level.

Interviewee #1 shared, additional support of other ethnic minority superintendents is also important based on having similar experiences. Membership in state associations as well as the associations for African American administrators (i.e., National Alliance of Black School Educators) or any other minority group associations can prove to be a beneficial means for networking, professional growth and career advancement.

The six interviewees readily shared experiences of how the superintendency impacted their personal lives or vice versa. Their narratives included the following:

- My husband had been diagnosed with a serious illness a day after I became a superintendent. This personal problem gave me more motivation to persevere and pursue the career which I have fought for. It was very challenging and inspiring at the same time since I have to deal with a lot of school problems as well.
- My family had to sacrifice a lot when I secured a position out of state and we had to relocate. My boys even turned subversive since they already have a lot of friends in our old neighborhood. My husband also had to find a new job.

- My professional circles were supportive but some were not. I could see how one can be criticized and stabbed behind her back just because she wants to improve herself.
- It took a lot of courage to vie for superintendency and even more spirit and courage to move to a new territory, geographically and otherwise.
- The economic conditions in the country and the levels of uncertainties in the public school systems also added up to the pressures. So many things have to be reformed and once you are at the helm, the pressure mounted.
- Being separated from my spouse when I applied for the superintendency made me realize the position also reflects the family standards which others expect you to follow. It was a hard climb in terms of personal standards but somehow I felt I was more competent in other professional aspects.

Interviewees #2 and #5 discussed the impact having strong knowledgeable mentors or sponsors at the onset of their administrative careers on their progression to become superintendents. Interviewee #1 added to the topic emphasized the role of mentors in ones journey towards the superintendency. She shared:

You really need a mentor to be able to reach the top. There are a lot of hurdles and challenges to the superintendency and it takes wisdom and humility to be able to listen well to someone else's advice; because sometimes, you seem to have a different approach to a problem or situation. These knowledgeable people have been there and the experiences and insights they bring to the table are far better than your own take on the situation. Mentors are very wise, indeed. They are also very generous with their time and their knowledge and skills. They can be extremely valuable on your way up.

One interesting quip from Interviewee # 3 is that beyond gender, she had actually related more with her male mentors and supporters than her female colleagues while serving as an assistant superintendent for human resources. She shared:

Black teachers have traditionally taken the road towards the ascendancy by way of trailing behind their White counterparts. Through my experiences, I have been entangled with more male peers, who served as my mentors and challengers. I believe it made me a better administrator. I have always wanted to prevail not only to prove that females are better but it just takes an urgent motivation to do more than what they can do. My male peers also gave objective views on situations which made sense to me, while I was learning the ropes and moving towards the superintendency.

### **Identified Themes to Shatter the Glass Ceiling**

Through consistent comparison, themes surfaced that were derived within the context of the research questions (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). This study identified themes to assist African American female aspirants to shatter the glass ceiling to public school district superintendency. The themes which emerged included (a) race and gender – not a barrier, (b) ability to impact the achievement gap, (c) collaborative leadership, (d) balance between family and career, (e) fast track mobilization and professional movement, (f) differences in pay and progression towards the superintendency, and (g) traits of effective mentors/role models.

#### **Race and Gender: Not a Barrier**

Interviewees did not recognize race as a barrier to their ascent to the superintendency. Similar to how they perceive race, the interviewees also did not see gender as a barrier in their progression to the position of public school district superintendent. Jackson (1999) found that African American female superintendents considered their gender as more debilitating for their

ascendancy to the superintendency than race. In contrast, Hoff and Mitchell (2008) showed women superintendents do not seriously consider gender as a barrier or as an insurmountable hurdle in their mobility patterns. Interviewees did however, all agree, once the position of superintendent was attained, gender was the more prominent barrier to the implementation of required duties of the superintendent. For example interviewees noted issues of disrespect, lack of responsiveness to directives, and non-acceptance of the position's authority across all realms of district stakeholders (i.e., subordinates school board, community, and parents).

This theme further served to validate the findings of Brunner's (1998) study that female aspirants need to erase old notions and perceptions of race and gender biases to ascend to the superintendency. All interviewees found their way on the path to the superintendency relatively early in their careers. While the journey entailed passing through various gender and racially laden issues and hurdles, interviewees chose not to elaborate on these barriers. Instead each interviewee focused on solutions to reach their goal of school district superintendent. Interviewees #5 and #6 intimated they did not let traditional and stereotypical issues of race and gender restrict their pursuit for higher positions in the school districts.

Of the information shared by interviewees, the issue of race and gender were very common. Some interviewees were hesitant to discuss the race barriers. Interviewee #4 expressed the need to show that she was more professional and discreet rather than be vocal about racial concerns. However, the interviewees collectively declared they feel competent and confident that their performance on the job would supersede the perceived barriers tied to the color of their skin. Interviewee #1 intimated that just maybe her performance would change some of the preconceived notions people had about her.

### **Ability to Impact the Achievement Gap**

All interviewees believed a solid education, professional background, and administrative experience to successfully impact change are the baseline and strongest key in the quest for superintendency. It is important to acknowledge the ‘achievement gap’ as a salient barrier of females who aspire to educational administrative leadership, particularly African American females (Johnson, 2012; Katz, 2004). Each interviewee articulated closing the achievement gap in their district as a priority. The achievement gap pertains to the quality of education which needs to be achieved by African American students in comparison with the achievement of White students. The ability to successfully close the achievement gap may be a personal concern and challenge, because African American superintendents immediately feel responsible for ensuring quality education for all students, especially African American students. The interviewees asserted their knowledge of effective instructional strategies and reform initiatives was critical to their selection as superintendent. Interviewee #1 indicated she strongly believed she was selected to her first superintendency based on a conference presentation on closing the achievement gap. Additionally, Interviewee #4 stated:

African American female superintendents as well as White female superintendents are burdened by the need to work hard and earn the respect and cooperation of the whole school community while improving academic rigor to close the achievement gap.

### **Collaborative Leadership**

Collaborative leadership was also a dominant theme in the narratives. This study affirmed the acknowledgment of African American female aspirants and the need for collaborative leadership amidst the demands and the problems of public school district

superintendency. The interviewees highlighted the significance of collaboration in their leadership approach or style to administration of their public school district.

This identified theme of collaborative leadership supports previous studies on women and leadership styles. Studies by Brunner (2000), Brunner and Grogan (2007), Katz (2004) and Johnson (2012) showed women who reached the superintendency were noted for utilizing a collaborative style of leadership. These individuals were more successful than those who displayed a more autocratic form of leadership. Other researchers have referred to collaborative leadership as co-opting or team building, delegation, and successfully working with people from different ranks as the collaborative leadership characteristics of successful female superintendents (Funk, Pankake, & Schroth, 2002).

As mentioned in the review of literature, the female leadership approach is often characterized by the ability to draw people and resources together resulting in to significant education change. Brown and Irby (2003) emphasized collaborative leadership as used by feminist organizations. They defined it is as being practiced through collaborative decision making, rotational leadership systems, promotion of cooperation, atmosphere of community, and the sharing of power. As mentioned above, several research studies affirmed the identified theme of collaborative leadership as successful strategy in garnering buy-in and cooperation for aspiring African American female superintendents. According to five of the six interviewees, collaborative leadership entails a lot of expectations, role modeling and hard work; the results can be very fulfilling.

The interviewees stressed effective leadership is critical to the success of any aspiring superintendent and must include the application of cooperation and collaboration style. In this study collaborative leadership is reflective of the personal backgrounds of each interviewee and

the leaders they served under. The interviewees acknowledged resiliency, an intentional effort to work in collaboration and partnership with others, including the development of a common vision and mission as a necessary skillset for African American female aspirants. All interviewees acknowledge the challenges as well as the ways to accomplish a collaborative framework. The majority of interviewees come from supportive families and communities, where they use and modeled collaboration as an effective means of addressing problems and tasks rather than through direct and authoritative approach.

### **Balance between Family and Career**

Another theme which was evident in the interviews of the six interviews was the need to find balance between family and career. In this study, Interviewees emphasized the importance of finding a balance between relationships with family, social network, one's career path and job responsibilities. Interviewee # 4 stated a need for a deliberate process in order to achieve success across all respects (family, social, and work). Each of the interviewee stressed the value and importance of having a balanced and grounded view of family and career. The interviewees attested to noted contributions, understanding, and support of family and social network lend to their ability to be resilient and successful when faced with challenging decisions and time consuming projects that come with being a school district superintendent.

The theme associated with finding balance between career and family correlates with findings identified within the literature on successful women leaders. Johnson (2012) found successful female superintendents have a defined commitment to family and spiritual renewal. Shakeshaft (1989) reported family as the foundational support for successful women leaders. According to interviewees, achieving balance between career and family can be a struggle as well as a stabilizer. For example, Interviewee # 5 indicated blocking out time for family and



including family in career-related events, when possible, allows family to relate to the rigors of the job. The African American female aims to reach the top position of public school district superintendent for financial and occupational rewards; yet, they become challenged by the very demands and pressures of family as they make their way towards the superintendency. Hence, interviewees agreed, balance between family and career is perceived as a barrier and a sanctuary. Interviewee #2 was motivated to ensure she provided a good home for her family while being successful in her career as a superintendent. For African American females, this balance serves as an inspiration even when it is difficult at times to balance both worlds: career and family.

Corollary to this theme is the balance African American females receive from their spiritual and family life. While not a part of the survey or interviews; the interviewees reflected a strong grounding in their spiritual or personal belief systems. Studies by Reed & Patterson (2007), and Shakeshaft et al., (2007) showed spiritual alignment and support serve as an important motivation and foundational support for female superintendents. The interviewees believed their spirituality and sense of familial support helps them overcome their perceived and actual barriers.

### **Fast Track Mobilization and Professional Movement**

Interviewees did not consider ethnicity as a significant element in the career path towards superintendency. However, there is a distinct relationship between the educational achievements of the aspirant and progression to the superintendency. While most superintendent openings prefer candidates who possess a doctoral degree, candidates without doctoral degrees are generally not considered unless they have enjoyed a long standing relationship with the public school district. For African American females, it is recommended they first earn a doctorate as a means to assist in their ascent to the superintendency.

The interviewees considered the following as successful strategies towards the public school district superintendency: visibility in the professional networks and knowing the community; doctoral degree completion, implementation of a plan of action to achieve career goals, creation of a resume which describes career experiences and accomplishments, developing self-confidence, garnering family support, extending district level leadership experience, adopting flexibility to relocate, and follow opportunities for advancement. The interviewees proffered the following insights relative to African American females' mobilization and personal growth:

- Measuring one's success by one's own standards, not by the standards of others.
- Being a visionary implementer, and collaborator; this is the bridge of making the dream a working reality.
- Managing one's emotions and having a personal stake in what one actively engages in.
- Care not over extend one's self or sell one's soul 'to the devil'.
- Having the integrity to fight for what one believes is right and being willing to 'fall down' on one's sword for it.
- Choosing one's battle.
- Being knowledgeable of the dynamics of the district, community and board of education.  
Ability to be a politician.
- Exposing one's self to various personal and professional experiences which can enrich one's stake in the role of superintendent that can prove useful later on.
- Always be fair, just, and consistent.
- Listen well to all kinds of people.

- Do not sacrifice family. They are one's source of strength and direction. When you have nothing else, you have family.
- Always be honest and have integrity. Take into consideration the welfare of the students at all times and at all costs. Students must be at the core of all decisions.
- Develop a shield of armor. Get accustomed to being disliked by one's subordinates. Don't take it personal.

### **Differences in Pay and Progression towards the Superintendency**

None of the interviewees noted major differences in their salary when compared to male and other female superintendents' educational and professional tenure and other related background. Interviewee #2 received a lower salary than her predecessor and believed it was due to her gender, but could not validate it as causation due to the fact she had yet to complete her doctoral degree. As a whole, interviewees were not aware of the contract negotiations of their predecessors. In that instance, they would be unable to determine if contract negotiations had any bearings on race and gender. Here again is another instance of the interviewees' inability to recognize the possible effects of race and gender bias related to efforts of African American females breaking through the glass ceiling to superintendency. Interviewees did not consider ethnicity as a significant element in the career path towards superintendency. However, there is a distinct relationship between the educational achievements of the aspirant and progression to superintendency.

While educational attainment is crucial in attaining positions of leadership, higher salaries, and larger school districts, two of the study participants did not have a doctorate degree and moved quickly from the principalship, to assistant superintendent, to the public school district superintendency within a four year window. Meanwhile, the other female participants

held doctorates from distinguished educational institutions. There was also no marked difference in making use of mentors and search firms.

### **Traits of Effective Mentors/Role Models**

The interviewees stated that as aspiring superintendents, they took advantage of networking opportunities, which enabled them to share familiar experiences with other female educators which offered them varied leadership, mentorship, guidance, and professional advisory opportunities. The interviewees acknowledged participation in associations provided additional support to maintain their commitment to attain superintendency. They collectively acknowledged the added advantage of networking and knowing some advanced information, like an available position, prior to its official announcement. All interviewees shared their desire to be perceived as an effective African American leader serving as a mentor and role model to other African American females.

Effective mentors are committed to assisting African American female aspirants in overcoming barriers of race and gender that impede advancement towards the superintendency ladder. These mentors are instrumental in building positive attitudes, self-confidence, and competence; traits that are required to acknowledge these barriers but not be hindered or deterred from achieving the goal of the superintendency. Key people in the lives of African American female aspirants were identified as: 1.) parents, 2.) teachers, 3.) college professors, 4.) school administrators, 5.) other superintendents, and 6.) political personnel (district stakeholders). Mentors and role models can be anyone as long as they encourage, inspire, and assist aspirants to be diligent in their efforts towards the superintendency. One interviewee mentioned:

Learning opportunities and leadership issues are much easier to tackle when one has a mentor who can assist in sieving through the issues, using his/her experience and

expertise so that the aspirants are encouraged to approach the situation with a clearer eye and a wider perspective. I am inspired when I see other African American women in the superintendent position who also dreamt and succeeded and who now instill in aspirants the desire to dream and aspire.

## **Discussions**

Several other findings emerged from this study but are not deemed to be themes. The researcher determined these findings to be noteworthy. The data showed similarities as well as differences in perceived barriers and challenges of the six interviewees as they navigated their way to the superintendency in their respective school districts. These barriers and challenges included demands of family, willingness to relocate, and exclusion from the informal ‘good old boys network,’ among others. The toughest barrier noted by the interviewees was the willingness or lack thereof to relocate. The relocation barrier also reflected the demanding nature of the role of school district superintendent which can be considered as ‘migrant work.’ The difficulty in deciding to ‘migrate’ or relocate is factors of the female superintendent’s personal and social life, and sense of connections. As such, relocation has been considered as one of the toughest barriers for female superintendents (Johnson, 2012).

Balance between family life and career can serve as a strategy and barrier. As a strategy for upward mobility, relocation represents opportunities for varied employment positions, greater experiences, and increased financial rewards for the family household. As a barrier, relocation can cause financial strain on the household. As it is, balancing career and family is already difficult for many female superintendents: African American, White, and other, yet they work to overcome it. For female superintendents, family is the main foundation of their life, thus, making the decision to uproot the family a difficult one. The possible loss of one’s social

network and spousal employment can also serve as a barrier to relocation for female superintendents. A study by Grogan and Brunner (2005) supported the findings that family demands play a critical role for female superintendents. This study confirmed the perceived difficulty many aspiring superintendents have with regards to their quest for superintendency.

The exclusion from the 'good old boys network' was not significant in this study. Three of the six interviewees spoke of not belonging to the "Network"; but having membership and relationships with other female superintendents in their area. Interviewee # 3 stated her female network provided opportunity to meet and discuss with likeminded leaders, issues around public education. Interviewee #1 stated:

I don't have time for the foolishness trying to connect and socialize the "good old boys" who care less that I am there and probably wish I wasn't.

In contrast, Kowalski and Stroude (1999), Glass et al., (2000), and Dana and Bourisaw (2006) reported that breaking into the 'Network' as a positive factor in attaining the superintendency. This noteworthy finding of this study appeared to disagree with the common notion that female aspirants' isolation from the valued networks does not limit their possible and future chances for career progression to the superintendency. Quietly, the researcher hypothesized unequal financial compensation as a factor in this study. However, the notion of unequal financial compensation was indicated by two survey respondents.

This finding refuted Haslett et al., (1992) declaration that various stereotypes interfere with women being accepted as leaders. As shown by survey respondents and interviewees, race and gender are not consistent burdens for them. The participants did not believe that they were less intellectually competent and logical than their colleagues whether they were, White, African American, male, or female. They also did not count their status or power as something to be

coveted and therefore did not wish to be admired for having the position alone. The female respondents of this study also did not conform to the old notions that females should focus solely on the success of the group (African American) and not on their own success.

This study's findings affirmed the work of Shakeshaft (1989) which reiterated the non-assurance that a person's actions (or perception) will be determined by their gender in all decision making situations. Shakeshaft further noted a common perception that men and women are different in their abilities, interest, mentality, and leadership. This perception was acknowledged and accepted by all interviewees.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

This chapter featured the summation of the survey respondents and interviewees' responses and insights into their trajectory and ascent to the public school district superintendency. The researcher identified themes gleaned from interviewees' responses and correlated those themes to theories and findings supported in the review of literature.

The interviewees did not fit the stereotypes of women. Shakeshaft (1989) claimed that the stereotypes around gender, when presented as facts, can be damaging. Shakeshaft further depicted gender stereotypes of women as too people centered, emotionally demonstrative, and unable to make difficult decisions. The interviewees confirmed non-acknowledgement of gender and racial biases positively served them better. Johnson (2012) depicted gender stereotypes of men as authoritarian, sexist, aggressive, and too focused as a matter of procedure; however, these characteristics were not emphasized by the interviewees in their perception of men. In contrast, interviewees described themselves as confident and competent in their ability to lead. Gender and racial differences and how interviewees approached their work may be paramount in their recognition of the racial and gender inequalities and stereotypes. Powell (1988) reported

leadership differences exist between the sexes related to behavior, responses to others, internal motivations, and subordinates' responses.

The six interviewees pointed out that they had to learn to understand how to deal with the racial and gender issues early in their administrative careers. By doing so, they have successfully confronted challenges to attain and maintain the superintendency position. As such, they have emerged from gender and racial discrepancies with greater resiliency and fortitude to confront larger educational and career challenges. Patterson and Kelleher's (2005) study showed that as it is, African American female superintendents are confronted with the same challenges as other superintendents.

Similar to the six interviewees, the survey respondents also showed a high regard for their position and the massive responsibility they have as superintendents of a public school district. They do not regard being African American females as an excuse or issue when it comes to performing their duties. As mentioned in the identified themes, race is not a performance factor in their work.

The interviewees' support systems were considered important to their success and continuance in the superintendency. Interviewees described their support systems as family, social circles, mentors and sponsors, professional associates, and colleagues. The interviewees also acknowledged the importance of fostering positive relationships with other superintendents and important personnel (colleagues). The interviewees used their positive relationships and interactions with people who enhanced and assisted them on their journey to superintendency. Female aspirants would be well-served to find and connect with women superintendents as a source of strength and inspiration. These educational leaders serve as an excellent resource to gain insight on how to balance family and career.



Mentorship emerged as one of the identified themes. All interviewees believed the knowledge, insights, and experiences shared by their mentors/sponsors has aided in how they approach the job of superintendent. Interviewees also indicated a commitment to mentoring others who aspire to the superintendency. Three of the interviewees spoke highly of their male and female superintendent mentors and sponsors who guided and inspired them as they strived to become superintendents. Katz (2006) suggested collaborative leadership is also extended through mentorship. Researchers have evidenced the significance of mentors for female aspirants and for current female superintendents (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Sanchez and Thornton, 2010). Shakeshaft et al. (2007) also stated the lack of mentors, networks, and sponsors are vital barriers for women aspiring to attain the superintendency. Current African American female superintendents as mentors can encourage and sustain aspirants through meaningful and strategic relationships which provide successful career development and instills confidence and strength for the journey.

This study supported the importance of mentors in the success of aspiring African American females. All interviewees acknowledged the positive contributions of their mentors, role models, and other support groups. These findings affirmed the studies of Sanchez and Thornton (2010) and Shakeshaft (1989) who emphasized the role of a mentor. They reported a mentor has a better chance of ensuring a candidate's access and success in securing the position of school district superintendent.

The findings of this study also supported variables which are considered as successful strategies for African American female aspirants towards the superintendency. These strategies include the following: being highly visible in professional networks, doctoral degree completion, implementation of a plan of action to achieve one's career goal, creation of a resume which

summarizes administrative/leadership experiences and accomplishments, possession of a strong concept of self, family support system, and district level experience and achievements.

The willingness to relocate is considered a significant barrier for female aspirants. In contrast, willingness to relocate is a successful strategy for female aspirants to move towards the superintendency. This study deduced relocation both as a factor for success and as perceived barrier in the female aspirants' quest for the superintendency. As it is, family demands define the limits of aspirations of female superintendents. Grogan and Brunner (2005) reported overcoming the barrier of relocation can come in many forms, including accepting commuter marriages to maintain the superintendency.

The interviewees declared themselves empowered African American female superintendents. The majority of interviewees were reluctant to discuss the influence of gender with regards to their attainment of the superintendency. They were however, more willing to discuss gender and the barriers associated with the superintendency. The findings did not affirm Amedy's (1999) conclusion that female administrators who utilize individual solutions as a means of addressing the collective issues of inequality do not pose an obvious challenge to the system. The findings aligned with findings in a study by Bell and Chase (1995) related to the idea of defeminization. The same way the six interviewees did not acknowledge race or gender as a significant factor to the acquisition of the superintendency; Bell and Chase (1995), pointed out female administrators/superintendents avoid the acknowledgement and discussion of race and gender based on their desire to be seen and evaluated without the interference of race or gender. Bell and Chase (1995) further claimed women, who lead, feel compelled to disaffiliate themselves from possible negative stereotypes associated with race and gender to prove different. This explanation by Bell and Chase (1995) reasoned the responses given by the

majority of interviewees to the interviewer's standard questions on barriers of race and gender. However, the semi-standardized interview allowed the researcher in this study to probe the interviewees with appropriate supplemental questions to utilize additional questions in the quest to go beyond the standard questions.

The interviewees indicated that a planned course of action in one's journey to attain the public school district superintendency is and should be the gold standard for any female seeking to attain the position. The interviewees did not depict their various courses and mobility patterns as traditional, remarkable, or stereotypical when compared to the patterns of men. The interviewees also did not put any particular emphasis on their distinct leadership roles and styles but stressed collaborative leadership supports their functions and roles as superintendents. Interviewees #1, #2, and #5 commented on colleagues as well as subordinates expecting their leadership styles to be either authoritative or a combination of various styles often reflective of male leaders. This finding was supported in a study by Hardebeck (1997) who contended most female superintendents saw themselves as public policy implementers focused on facilitation, while others stressed development and differed in how they accomplish the task. Facilitators are communicators and developers who establish ways to enable others to accomplish the goal.

While attitudes toward female educational leaders are changing, stereotypes still exist where men and women are concerned. Given the difficulty of the tasks associated with leading a public school district in today's educational environment, researchers like Haslett, Giles, and Carter (1992) declared leadership as problematic for women, especially African American women, based on the bias of others. Whether male leaders and female leaders make the same decisions, have similar leadership styles, or act in the same way; their actions are externally perceived in different ways by those who hold bias. The interviewees agreed that barriers and

challenges associated with race and gender do exist. They were not as willing to accept they were a victim of such barriers.

Each of the interviewees in this study believed and embraced the ability to make a difference for students in their district especially in the context of the demands for quality education and closing the achievement gap. However, they did not indicate being pressured to solve all the problems in the educational system. As reported, they were more focused on making a difference in the quality of education as centered on African American and other minority students more than anything. The interviewees contended they were driven to ‘close the achievement gap’, transform lives, and aid in the eradication of poverty and other challenges students face daily. The interviewees also indicated achieving the goal of closing the achievement gap could sway the negative perceptions tied to being women in administration, particularly the African American female in a positive direction.

## **Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations**

The perceived barriers and challenges reported by the interviewees and survey respondents were numerous yet proved surmountable and not confined to gender and race. Race and gender – not a barrier, balance between family and career, ability to impact the achievement gap, collaborative leadership, fast track mobilization and professional movement, difference in pay and progression towards the superintendency, and traits of effective mentors and role models emerged as the recurring themes leading towards the successful attainment of the public school district superintendency. The interviewees identified collaborative leadership style as a quality supported by their personal background, family ties, and personal character. Interviewees' progression to the superintendency varied and depended on other factors such as engagement with a search agency, mentors and sponsor guidance, and professional and social associations and circles. The participants believed it important for African American female aspirants to earn advanced educational degrees and participate in professional growth opportunities. The interviewees impressed that aspiring African American female hopefuls must be resilient, visible, resourceful, people oriented, problem solvers, collaborative, flexible, risk takers, diligent, and knowledgeable.

The interviewees did not easily detach nor segregate barriers or challenges associated to issues of gender and race, in their path to the public school district superintendency. While they acknowledged the important role of mentors, sponsors, and professional colleagues; they also did not delineate between having a male or female mentor, nor a preference for either. The interviewees believed having more diverse mentors gave aspirants a more varied outlook. Interviewees acknowledged female and male superintendent colleagues, associates, and other African American female superintendents as their most supportive mentors and propellers to

their success in attaining the position of superintendent. These mentors and role models provided important professional insights, guidance, advice, leadership, and experience on mentee development, skills, and learning as they progressed to the position of public school district superintendency. It is important to note the interviewees also acknowledged the positive aspects of possessing a skill in balancing between family and career. All interviewees identified these supports as essential elements in the African American females' quest for superintendency.

Trajectory to the superintendency (i.e., teacher, assistant principal/principal, central office, and superintendent) followed a normal path for the interviewees; however, the majority contended the time period seemed less than normal. The majority of interviewees (four of six) have doctoral degrees and only one moved from the principalship directly to the superintendency. Hence, aspirants must seriously consider earning a doctoral degree, not just to be considered and accepted by the Board and their peers, but for their own personal, professional, and intellectual growth. The interviewees stressed the need for aspirants' accomplishments in proven educational reform serve as a distinguished trait/quality for search agencies and search committees. The interviewees further stressed the need for aspirants to be socially oriented, visible, and enjoy an extensive network of school personnel and community partners. In short, African American female superintendent aspirants must be encircled by people who know the demands of the superintendency and who recognize and understand the context in which women are treading.

The interviewees underscored the need for African American female aspirants to stay abreast of educational reform initiatives grounded in best practices, and closing the achievement gap. The ability to address the goal of improved student performance is an essential skill set of any aspirant to the superintendency, especially African American females. The interviewees

confided that this particular ability and skill was an influential factor in their ascent to the public school district superintendency. This study focused on current African American female superintendents and their reflections of their path to superintendency. However, it is important to note that interviewees did not downplay race and gender for African American female aspirants.

## **Conclusions**

Since the late 1800s, the position of public school district superintendent has been acknowledged as one of the most powerful posts in the United States public school educational system. Social factors and political pressures have impacted the role of the superintendent and the public's perception of the role. As such, the superintendency has emerged from teacher, to academic, to applied scientist, and press relations officer (Kowalski, 2006). As new roles evolved, new expectations developed issues of race and gender became more pronounced as more people of color sought the prominent post of the public school district superintendent.

This study's literature review focused on studies of African American females as it related to the historical context of the male dominion over the public school system, general educational leadership, administrative leadership, and public school district superintendency. The literature review did not produce a dearth of consistent or comprehensive research which recognized or focused on the experiences of African American females as they progressed towards the position of public school district superintendent.

National, State, and local education agencies and leaders are confronted with the arduous task of addressing mounting educational problems and challenges to improve student academic outcomes, closing the achievement gap, collaborating with various outside linkages, finding sustainable funding solutions, operations management, and control over daily crises, among

other daily tasks and administrative functions. How a superintendent manages these challenges and how he or she thinks of solutions as they remain capable and confident, is to be commended.

African American females and other women superintendents are confronted with these challenges like their male superintendent counterparts. The participants in this study conveyed the confidence and courage to implement the much needed changes, especially associated with closing the achievement gap in their public school districts. It is also important to point out that aside from race and gender barriers, women leaders also have to cope with personal and social problems related to their successful administration management; for instance the need to find balance in their family life and their careers. So much resiliency, innovation, and strength have been displayed by the study participants in keeping their leadership position while facing continuous challenges.

To conclude, the six interviewees in this study have come to naturally expect problems and challenges. They all understood and accepted the demands of the position. The interviewees noted that African American female aspirants must be bold, patient, and have a high tolerance for complex situations and decision making. When queried regarding the perceived barriers and challenges faced towards progression to the superintendency, the interviewees acknowledged and presented their challenges and/or adversities without remorse. They all accepted situations linked to the position and understood the requirement to focus on opportunities to make changes. The interviewees emphasized the importance of African American female aspirants being focused on the work that matters most; the children they serve, their values, and the alignment of those values with their professional actions.

The interviewees unanimously shared the values of integrity, honesty, and how their personal experiences and beliefs sustained their progression. All believe their personal and



professional experiences actually shaped the kind of superintendent they have become. They have enriched their expertise through their unique experiences as a result of being an African American female. Each interviewee indicated a sense of conviction, concept of self and individual strength; all of which over time became personal assets which aspirants to the superintendency should strive to achieve. Additionally, they pointed out that African American female aspirants to the superintendency possibly will be enriched by the support of mentors and professional colleagues, in order to handle the academic and developmental needs of the public school district.

This study collected important information from interviewees who provided real examples as to how they attained and sustained themselves in their work as a public school district superintendent. The information and knowledge gleaned from this study will contribute to the existing data on African American female public school district superintendents. This study proposed a model/guide for African American female aspirants to utilize in the quest for the public school district superintendency.

The interviewees downplay of race and gender issues do not necessarily negate the disparity between male-dominated superintendency in the public school districts as compared to the underrepresentation of female superintendents nationwide. The researcher contends race and gender were indeed factors in the acquisition of the public school district superintendency for the six interviewees; however, they have chosen not to acknowledge such.

Among others, the interviewees perceived the demands of family, and willingness to relocate as significant barriers to the position. The interviewees emphasized the need to find balance between family and career and a deliberate plan to maintain familial support as an important consideration for any female who sought the position of the public school district

superintendent. The interviewees recognized professional development programs as important tools which possibly promote professional growth and enhance skills required to overcome the perceived barriers and challenges. The interviewees contended aspirants would be well served to utilize the successful strategies listed in the outcomes of this study. To that end, the researcher recommends African American female aspirants to the superintendency utilize the recommendations from this study.

The interviewees considered their career trajectory to the superintendency to be normal: They moved through the role of teacher, assistant principal/ principal, assistant superintendent, other district leadership, and then superintendent. One interviewee however, progressed from principal to superintendent. Five of the interviewees acknowledged their rapid advancement to superintendency as being unanticipated while one shared her ascent to superintendency encompassed 18 years. Interviewees emphasized their foundational knowledge as an essential asset to the job of superintendency and improving academic outcomes for students.

Federal, state, and local education agencies seek candidates for superintendency who possess foundational knowledge to arrest the academic deficiencies of large urban public school districts. These agencies, while not directly involved in the selection process, often have input in the criteria to be used in the selection process. It is indicative of African American female aspirants to develop an expertise in addressing the academic deficiencies of at-risk and minority students. According to Adams (2012), school executive search firms believe large school districts are increasingly moving in the direction of hiring qualified minority candidates with the experience/expertise to lead and improve a sizeable school organization. Hence, several changes in the superintendent selection process may be underway.

Superintendents who primarily work in large urban school districts also manifest the same challenges which confront rural school districts; including but not limited to a lack of resources and funding, lack of qualified faculty, and low student performance. This study found potential guidelines for African American female public school district superintendent aspirants to incorporate in their preparation to potentially lead and improve public school districts of any size or challenge. The research is not clear as to the viable support structures that exist beyond mentors, sponsorships, and colleagues that undergird African American female public school district superintendent aspirants' success.

The interviewees stressed the importance of collaborative leadership in terms of improving student outcomes within the framework of social justice (equal access and opportunity). An African American public school district superintendent aspirant should engage, observe, and inform the district's stakeholders in formal/informal public settings prior to the position acquisition. The interviewees pointed out the need to gather enough support and buy-in from various stakeholders as a key strategy for aspirants. Hence, specific leadership and personal skills are required to be considered a viable candidate for the position of public school district superintendent.

The interviewees also identified the fundamental challenges and limitations, gender and race, they experienced as superintendents proved non-existent in their ascent to the superintendency. Upon acquisition to the superintendency, the interviewees noted these limitations and challenges imposed by fellow superintendents (predominantly males). It is essential for aspirants to be aware of the potential for such action. The interviewees also recognized the importance of networking and collaborating with other female superintendents for professional and personal support.

While each interviewee shared challenges faced with respect to their work and interaction with boards of education, they all noted having to work hard, not being affected by the constraints often presented by board or individual members. They emphasized reverting back to focusing only the core work. It is important to mention, boards of education have their own set of problems and superintendents, female or male, should not concentrate their focus on this. Instead they should maintain focus on solving the greater challenges associated with students and academic achievement outcomes.

The interviewees' ability to effectively make a difference in the lives of students emerged as a significant factor in their decision to seek the position of public school district superintendent. Interviewee #1 noted changing life's trajectory for even one student, justified becoming an aspirant to the superintendency worthwhile. The interviewees also understood highly qualified staff, who delivered quality instruction resulting in a quality education, can transform not only students but families as well. Most of the interviewees identified with their district families and provided the necessary resources for a quality education.

The interviewees emphasized that women in educational leadership positions, particularly African American women, must continue to work against the challenges and negative perception about women and not give in to the preconceived notions or stereotypes as directly related to female public school district superintendents and how they lead. Each interviewee declared they are and will continue to be committed to the work of leading their perspective districts regardless of the challenges, barriers, or perception of others. This resiliency is well supported by the literature on African American female leaders who have taken the role of community activist and function as a stabilizing and consistent element in communities (Kramp, 2004).

The interviewees did not consider differences in salary as a major barrier to upward mobility confronting female administrators. The participants in this study did not recognize a marked difference in this area. In fact, only one respondent noted differences in salary. It is important to note that further attempts to explore factors which give rise to the development of perceptions of barriers to mobility patterns by African American female superintendents would prove useful to researchers, international educators, school administrators, and women (Berman, 1999).

Boards of Educations search for aspirants who possess the perceived characteristics required to meet the needs of the district/community in terms of knowledge, skill, and experience; in addition to the unspoken requirement of demographic match. The pool of aspirants is then limited to those candidates who most favorably matched the perceived needs of the school district but are sometimes not the best candidate. When African American women attain the top leadership position of public school district superintendent, more women of color may have the opportunity to yield significant educational influence, enhance social, and political power (Brunner, 1998). However, combinations of various factors have reduced access for women to the public school district superintendency (Amedy, 1999).

Past studies have identified the barriers females confront in the quest for public school district superintendency. Geographic location and district size influence female and particularly African American female access to the superintendency (Christie et al., 2007). Rural school boards in comparison to more urban school boards are seeking candidates who are reflective of their community geographic and demographic make-up (Garn & Brown, 2008). Boards of Education for public school districts continue to perpetuate stereotypical recruitment and

identification of aspirants who align demographically with their predecessor in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender (Berman, 1999).

The reality remains; the educational profession continues to be dominated by female teachers and female principals, yet women, specifically African American women continue to be underrepresented at the level of public school district superintendent. Johnson (2012) reported this trend is driven by the superintendent selection process, which developed by men for men and not directed to the kinds of administrative posts that many female who aspire to the superintendency seek. It is also extended because many females opt for balance in the demands of their family against their career interests and inclinations to move up the career ladder. In contrast, males tend to have a sharper focus on career advancement than on the balance of family and career.

The underrepresentation of African American female superintendents is influenced by the fact that most female superintendents choose the career paths that allows them a high-quality work life and personal life. In terms of opportunities for leadership and networking, females who aspired to the superintendency often sabotaged themselves by buying into perceived barriers associated with race and gender and the notion that the mentoring experience is an advantage that many male superintendent candidates share. Generally, these crucial factors reduce the female access to the superintendency (Moran, 1992).

While the disparity gap in minority representation at the superintendent level exist, studies indicated this disparity gap are closing. In recent years the number of minorities entering superintendent preparation programs and ultimately the superintendency is greater than ever before. Studies by Amedy (1999), Johnson (2012), and Katz (2006) reported minority educators are entering their initial administrative posts at about the same time as their non-minority

counterparts. The interviewees recognized ‘the good old boy network’ as not being a major barrier to their career options and were at times used to the advantage of the interviewee. The increase in representation of African American female public school district superintendent and other minority superintendents is a means of ensuring aspiring minority superintendents have more role models, also leading to more mentoring and sponsorships, professional growth, and extended networking opportunities. The success of African American female superintendents in this study served as prime examples in breaking through the glass ceiling of racial and gender barriers; whether perceived or actual.

The ability to relocate can become a crucial issue and barrier for African American female aspirants. The issues of family and the ability to relocate, cuts across various levels of personal and professional demands and challenges for women who aspire to leadership. The personal choices and demands of family and social circles of African American females aspiring to be public school district superintendents; can become barriers and reduce access. Often times superintendent candidates limit themselves by not seeking opportunities outside of their geographic areas to attain either their formal education or to secure a superintendent position.

### **Implications**

From the findings of this study, several implications can be deduced for female aspirants to the public school district superintendency, particularly those who are African American. It also holds certain implications for superintendent preparation programs. This study enhanced the development of a foundation for further studies based on the real, unique stories of the six African American female superintendents who participated in the study. Much of what the interviewees shared is supported by the literature, yet there are many other themes that are yet to be identified and further studied.

It was acknowledged early in the study that most superintendent studies are still geared towards the male paradigm. The present review of the literature also evidenced the limited information, resources, and materials found on African American female superintendents in public school districts. As pointed out by Tillman and Cochran (2000), more studies are needed in the areas of racial and gender equity in order to continue and further expand knowledge on the experiences and perspectives of not only African American female superintendents, but female superintendents from other minority groups as well as African American males.

### **Implications for Female Aspirants to the Superintendency**

The information of this study may have proved helpful to the female aspirants to the public school district superintendency in terms of understanding and contextualizing race and gender as real or perceived barriers to the superintendency. However, like the interviewees and survey respondents, females aspiring to the superintendency cannot allow issues of race and gender deter them from that which they aspire.

Aspiring female superintendents should be objective and clear about having a male or a female mentor and sponsors as guides to become familiar with the challenges presented by the superintendency. Their orientations must not be solely based on the gender and race alone but on the general leadership and management principles which their mentors and or sponsors will impart. Male and female aspirants should be encouraged with regard to the possibilities that exist, but must also know if they are attracted to the superintendency for the right purpose or reason, not just for personal gain or notoriety. To add, avenues should be explored that encourage African American candidates, including women of other race or color, such as Hispanic and Asian females, to seek the school district superintendency.



Gender bias is a big barrier which influences female aspirants as well as current female superintendents. Yet, this study showed that the weight given to the issues may serve more as a hindrance than help. The findings showed that the majority of the interviewees were somewhat reluctant in identifying race and gender as perceived barriers for those who aspire to become superintendents. It is also noteworthy that none of the participants willingly acknowledged racial and gender bias had anything to do with their ascension to the public school district superintendency, per se, until prodded to confront the issues. This could be attributed to various factors. Banuelos (2008) suggested the lack of acknowledgement may be due to the tendency of female superintendents to be discreet on these overt issues.

### **Implications for Superintendent Preparation Programs**

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has identified a set of eight professional standards that serve as recommendations for superintendent preparation programs. AASA pointed out, in addition to the identified standards, the ability to manage strategically, accountability for academic outcomes for students, knowledge of effective instructional strategies, and principal performance as the criteria for the development, preparation, and selection of highly qualified superintendents (AASA Website, 2012). Preparation programs for aspirants have generally been designed for a White population and predominantly referred to and attended by men (Hutton & Grougeon, 1993). This type of program is described as weak in providing an adequate preparation program for female and minority professionals who aspire for the superintendency post. It is further noted that the courses offered are taught from the perspective of the White male with gender, racial and ethnic related overtones and issues underplayed (Tillman & Cochran, 2000).

There is a need to strike a crucial balance in superintendent preparation and development programs, especially for those confined in public school districts. It is important to note large urban districts are already suffering from the challenges of lack of resources, funding, teacher certification, and student academic achievement (Johnson, 2012). Most of the African American superintendents, male or female, are already under privileged in this situation, as they generally are assigned to large to medium, impoverished urban school districts. This situation is an important element of the superintendency preparation and has a direct impact on the performance and tenure of African American school administrators and superintendents. Hence, this critical aspect must be addressed in order to achieve balance to provide viable opportunities for female and minority aspirants to the public school district superintendency.

This study has given important insights for understanding the experiences of the six African American female superintendents who stressed the significance of enhanced superintendency preparation programs. Glass et al., (2000) emphasized management courses for superintendents in the area of finance would also lend to the success of aspirants. The interviewees echoed the need for development in finance due to limited opportunities to obtain more education and training exposures in this respects prior to their appointment as a school district superintendent. The interviewees indicated being trained in areas such as strategic planning and community relations may prove beneficial to aspirants to the public school district superintendency.

Superintendency preparation programs need to be further developed to cover areas of accountability, state and federal mandates, reduced funding, superintendent /board relations, and community engagement. Management training must further be reinforced to empower more female and minority aspirants to seek the superintendency. Quality preparation programs will

aid in the development of competent individuals who meet leadership and administrative requirements of the superintendency position. Hence, it is important for superintendent preparation programs to be more attuned to all the aspects of leadership and management requirements of the superintendency and the gender and racial issues as well.

### **Implications for Practice**

There is a specific set of licensure competencies which is now required for superintendents as a nationwide professional standards. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders, (ISLLCS), outlines and describes standards encountered and necessary for the effective management of a school district. Most teacher and administrator preparation programs are aligned to the ISLLC and have identified the need to further address the lack of standards which address accountability for the crucial aspects of superintendency such as student academic performance, teacher development principal performance, there is also a need to acknowledge the lack of development enhancements for female and minority groups.

The participants in this study expressed the need for specific development programs and support system for superintendents to be successful and maintain their effectiveness as school superintendents. While the mentorship program seems informal, the development program should be enhanced as the means of developing the skills and competence of aspiring superintendents tied to dealing with issues of race and gender.

Various state departments of education should further develop aspiring superintendent academy programs to include session on cultural relevance as an educational resource and support system to train and sustain aspiring superintendents across the country. Carefully designed learning programs should be initiated as a part of the course requirement in

superintendent certification programs that address the sensitive topic of race and gender, privilege and internalized oppression. Courses such as these will have a positive effect on the training and selection process of African American women and other minorities who aspire to become superintendents in addition to heightening the understanding of others.

Boards of Education should devolve district-level support to enhance the superintendent preparation programs with local colleges, universities and professional organizations. District support will aid in making such programs more effective. For example, more hands-on behavioral activities associated with policy knowledge, finance, short and long range strategic planning, effective instructional strategies and organizational management must be offered wherein, African American female superintendents can hone their leadership skills through internship experience which will further make them better qualified for the superintendency and sustain them when they achieve the position.

### **Implications for Policy**

Policy assessment, further research and theoretical evaluation must be applied to the development of all preparation programs. The skills, knowledge and dispositions of the aspirants have to be excellently and deliberately developed in order to adequately prepare aspiring leaders for the superintendency in terms of strategic planning, finance, school law and collaborative leadership. The preparation and development imparted should be reflected in the trainees' actual practice as they become superintendents in their own rights.

There are numerous policy implications suggested by this study's findings. The collective findings of this study and the review of literature stress the importance of intentional policy deliberations (at the local, state, and national level) with regards to the inclusion of the African American female superintendents and aspirants that provide increased financial and

technical support towards the development and ultimate success. As earlier mentioned, current development programs are oriented/grounded in the male perspective are designed by and for males. Current professional development trainings do not take into account the perspectives of minorities and diverse educational settings that are present today.

A quality example is the Harvard Superintendent's program; an annual program that provides an internship and mentorship system for current superintendents and those who aspire to be superintendents. Policy changes can be inserted into the program to address key components surrounding diversity. The roles and responsibilities of the school district superintendent should also be reevaluated in order to garner a fresh assessment of what policies are needed to address duties of today's superintendent. The interviewees in this study mentioned important professional development training which can be incorporated into state wide policy revisions. The interviewees' collective suggestions for policy and program inclusion indicated the orientation and assessment of aspiring superintendents in addressing overall the need for policy revision.

### **Recommendations**

This study analyzed the various insights of the respondents and turned them into useful strategies to overcome the challenges associated with attracting, recruiting and the identification of African American female and other minority aspirants for superintendency positions.

Recommendations for further research:

- Conduct studies of superintendent preparation and certification programs pertinent to racial and gender stereotypes and barriers to better prepare women and minorities for the public school district superintendency.

- Conduct further studies on perceived barriers of race and gender and strategies of current public school district superintendents to benefit African American female aspirants, utilizing Critical Race Theory.
- Extend the research to African American females in other public school district leadership roles and geographic locations throughout the United States.
- Investigate the impact of the gender and racial makeup of School Boards as it related to the recruitment and selection of superintendents.

Other recommendations include incorporating a structured mentoring system in the nationwide recruitment for female administrators. Study outcomes suggest, mentors have greatly aided in the attainment of the superintendency for female aspirants. In spite of the geographic location of the district, career trajectory, gender of supervisor, or length of tenure; mentors providing mentees with critical career direction, inspiration, and support by assisting them with career change (Berman, 1999). Females also tend to have greater self-esteem and confidence by associating with their mentors.

Secondly, African American female administrators who aspire to the superintendency would benefit from experiential superintendency development programs intended to provide opportunities for internships and provide quality feedback. To enhance the qualities of effective leadership, female superintendents should be challenged beyond the limits of the academic conventions of women attaining degrees and certification in educational administration, to addressing females who can work and be successful in the male dominated school context, where women have not historically had the same opportunity or level of decision-making which men have and do.

Women aspirants for senior-level educational administrative positions (i.e., superintendents, assistant superintendents, etc.) need to develop and utilize the necessary leadership skills required for future career development and success. The high standards expected of school district superintendents would then be assessed on a more equitable standard according to specific actions of both male and female (Berman, 1999).

The final recommendation as to further improving future administrative practices would be to provide opportunities to meet, network and collaborate with other school superintendents around more relevant and serious issues that plague public education today. This would ensure female superintendents (African American, White, and other) are able to use the experiences, insights, and competence of their superintendent colleagues to develop into better professionals. Berman (1999) contended ongoing discussion addressing technical, administrative and personal support makes a solid foundation for mentoring, leadership development, and professional and personal development.

Each of the interviewees shared information about their experiences as public school superintendents. Questions posed to each superintendent gave deeper insights into the opportunities and challenges they face on a daily basis as they attempt to bring together a community centered on achieving better student and educational outcomes. The initial recommendation is to conduct further studies on perceived barriers of race and gender and strategies of current public school district superintendents to benefit African American female aspirants, utilizing Critical Race Theory.

Longitudinal studies aimed to investigate how female superintendents perceive barriers to upward mobility in school district superintendency may emerge or change during a three-year

period (or any time frame as studied), for instance. This may significantly add to the less than voluminous body of knowledge on female, ethnic minority superintendents (Berman, 1999).

The second recommendation is the investigation of the presence or absence of relationships or correlations between various types of female superintendents in various school districts in terms of their successful progression and attainment of their professional career goals. It should be ascertained whether or not female perceptions affect their upward mobility in specific geographic locations and this would expand existing understanding into a more defined characterization of female, African American superintendents (Berman, 1999).

Another recommendation is to investigate the level of perceptions of barriers to upward mobility among serving in less prominent administrative posts (i.e., assistant principals, coordinators, directors). No evidence was found in recognizing the aspirations of those who are in the ranks and also want to become superintendents (Berman, 1999).

The last recommendation is to further study the value associated with and beyond the impact which formal instruction has on helping aspirants advance and move towards higher positions in their educational careers. It is crucial to determine that there are other indicators or variable which can be used to study the perceptions of barriers and the mobility patterns of the African American female superintendents in the United States within rural school districts. The outcomes of this study already evidenced a vital difference between the perceptions of barriers by the interviewees, who had been promoted as external or internal candidates.

Further studies are recommended on the underrepresentation of African American female superintendents, other women and minorities who aspire to be superintendents are needed in order to increase access, opportunity, and attainment of the position of public school district superintendent.



## Chapter 5 Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceived barriers of African American female superintendents and the challenges navigated to acquire positions in school districts located in Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. This study will provide critical information for African American female who aspire to be public school district superintendents. The outlined qualities of leadership, role models, experiences, similarities or differences in career paths and/or directions on the way to the superintendency may be useful for aspirants as they seek to acquire the superintendency.

The study participants outlined numerous barriers and challenges but remained adamant that race and gender did not play a significant role. The recurring themes and mobility patterns leading towards the successful attainment of the superintendency were; strong educational achievement, administrative preparation and experience, commitment, integrity, and resourcefulness. The progression of the interviewees to the superintendency varied and depended on other factors such as engagement with a search agency, mentors and sponsor guidance, professional and social associations, and networking circles.

This study analyzed the various insights of the respondents and converted them into useful strategies Aspirants to the superintendency can use in order to overcome the challenges associated with attracting, recruiting, and identifying African American females and other minority aspirants for public school district superintendency positions. The interviewees stressed that following strategies may prove useful to aspirants:

- Develop superintendent preparation programs that better prepare aspirants to lead Urban school districts that include but are not limited to strategic planning, long range financial

planning, instructional reform, and cultural relevance (i.e., racism, genderism, classism, social justice)

- Board of Education must shift their expectations for the position of public school district superintendent
- Structured mentorship and sponsorships where aspirants are paired with highly qualified individuals that will assist in the navigation to the through the superintendency

Other recommendations include incorporating a structured mentoring system in the nationwide recruitment for female administrators. Study outcomes suggest, mentor have greatly aided in the attainment of the superintendency for female aspirants. African American female administrators who aspire to the superintendency would benefit from experiential superintendency development programs intended to provide opportunities for internships and provide quality feedback in urban settings. Women aspirants for senior-level educational administrative positions (i.e., superintendents, assistant superintendents, etc.) need to develop and utilize the necessary leadership skills required for their future career development and success. Lastly to further improving future administrative practices, aspirants should take advantage of opportunities to meet, network and collaborate with other school superintendents around the more relevant and serious issues the plague public education today. This actions might ensure female superintendents (African American, White, and other) are better equipped to use the experiences, insights, and competence of their superintendent colleagues to develop into highly qualified candidate to the public school superintendency.

Further studies are recommended on the underrepresentation of African American female superintendents, other women and minorities who aspire to be superintendents are needed in

order to increase access, opportunity, and attainment of the position of public school district superintendent. Recommendations for further studies are:

- Conduct further studies on perceived barriers of race and gender and strategies of current public school district superintendents to benefit African American female aspirants, utilizing Critical Race Theory.
- Extend the research to African American females in other public school district leadership roles and geographic locations throughout the United States.
- Investigate the impact of the gender and racial makeup of School Boards as it related to the recruitment and selection of superintendents.
- Conduct studies of superintendent preparation and certification programs pertinent to race and gender stereotypes, and barriers to better prepare women and minorities for the public school district superintendency.

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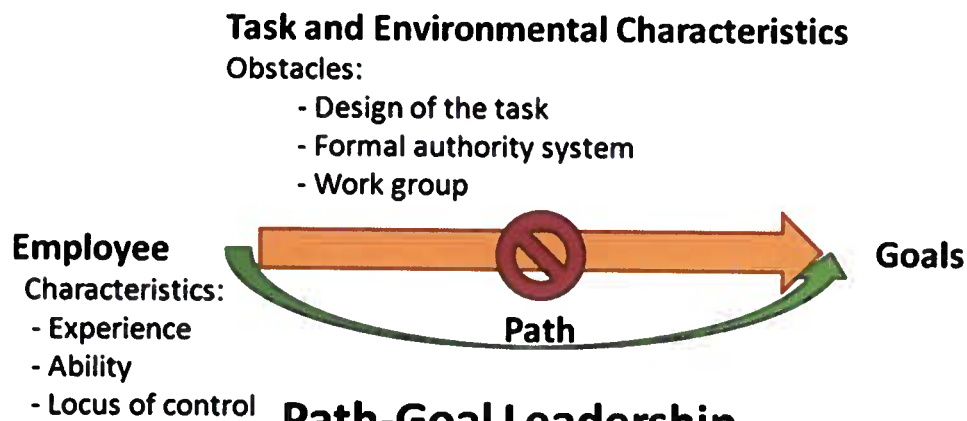
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## Appendix A

### Path-Goal Leadership Theory



### Path-Goal Leadership

Consider:

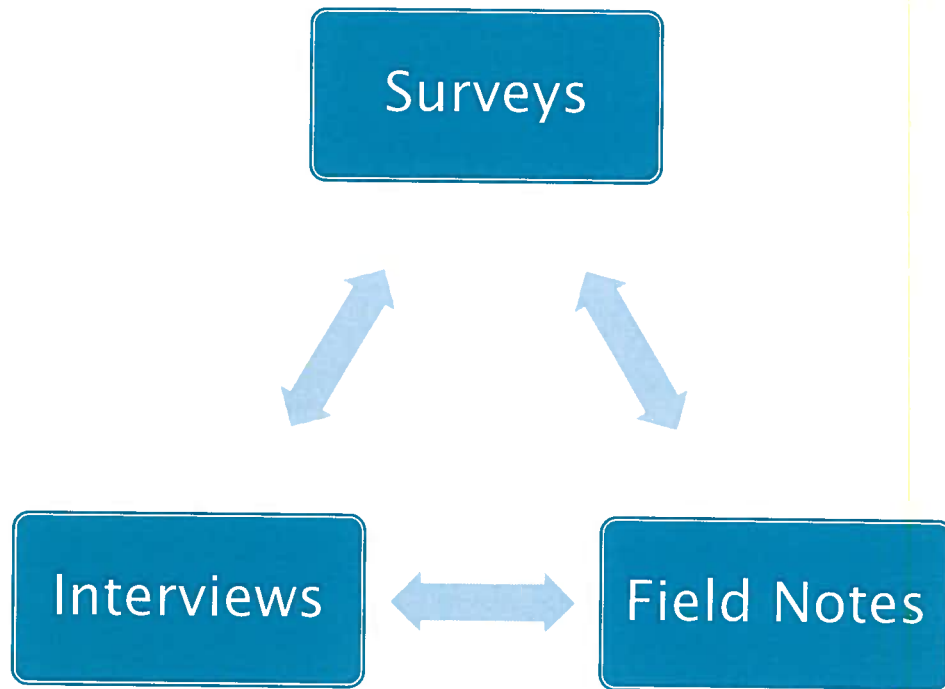
- Employee characteristics
- Task & environment characteristics

Select Leadership Style:

- Directive
- Supportive
- Participative
- Achievement-oriented

Focus on Motivation:

- Define goals
- Clarify path
- Remove obstacles
- Provide support

**Appendix B****Triangulation of Data**

## Appendix C

### Interviews

Dissertation Work – Joylynn Pruitt

Audio #1

Key: I = Interviewee # 1

R= Researcher

R: You are knowledgeable that I am recording this interview?

I: Yes I am aware that this interview is being recorded.

R: Your survey indicated that this is your third superintendency. Tell me a little about the first district and the student demographic.

I: My first superintendency was in-----, Virginia, I was there for four years starting in 2005. The student demographics were 5% African American, 10% Asian and 85% White. The student enrollment was 10, 000-15,000; with 3% Free Lunch, and 40% Free and Reduced Lunch.

R: Were you the first African American female superintendent?

I: Yes, I was the first African American Female superintendent as well as the first African American superintendent.

R: How did you find out about the position?

I: I was recruited by a search firm. They told me they heard me present at a national conference on Ruby Payne. They encouraged me to apply and then invited me to interview.

R: Your first district was 85% White, and you were the first African American; was the board, staff and community perception of you as the new leader?

I: People did not know what to expect. They were unsure of what to expect. So I had to face the stereotypes of how people perceived I would lead. Some thought I would aggressive. Many

thought that because I was Black, I had to have a good understanding of poverty. There was only one African American Board of Education member. Many had the expectation that I would be very active on issues of social justice and closing the achievement gap. There was only one African American principal. The community was an NAACP community. This was an affluent community that did not know what to expect.

R: I stated only one Board Member was African American, male or female?

I: The one African American Board of Education member and no females on the Board.

R: How did the staff and community receive you?

I: Internally, the staff was resistant to my leadership. Externally many of the community members were excited about change and also wanted to firm approach to leadership.

R: Why did you leave after only four years?

I: I had to leave due to family situation, my grandmother became gravely ill and I needed to be closer to home. It was hard to leave, in fact, the position stayed vacant for a year after I left. If I did not have to leave, I believe I would still be there.

R: So tell me about your second district; city and demographics.

I: I was the superintendent for ----- Academy in ----- . I was a finalist for ----- . It was a small one building K-12 Charter District. We served approximately 1,500 students. The student population was 99% African American. The previous superintendent was a White female and 90% of the staff was White. I served as superintendent for three years.

R: Did you experience any barriers based on your race and or gender?

I: I did not experience barriers tied to my race or my gender. I was actually well received and used my role as superintendent to make sure students were successful and that I was firm in addressing the Charter Schools – KIPP Model. There was a time when I thought there was a

barrier or should I say expectation of those that thought I as an individual had to ensure that students would achieve. The expectation was that because I was Black I should understand how to do that.

R: Please speak to your trajectory or upward mobility to the superintendency.

I: I was a teacher in ----- School District for four years. I then became a principal in ----- School District for two years. Where I felt and was fully supported by the superintendent. From there I went ----- School District which is an affluent school district in -- ----- County where I served as assistant superintendent. My colleagues there were cordial but I felt they thought “Why are you here?” Since I was the only Black face at Central Office, I am sure what I experienced was not the norm. They thought I was okay to work with the Black kids in the district, but not worthy to sit at the leadership table. When the leadership team would meet, I was never asked my opinion. I did not let it bother me; I did not have time for such foolishness. My loyalty was to the superintendent who hired me and to this day serves as my mentor.

R: Male, female, Black or White?

I: A White male.

R: Wow, how did you cope?

I: There was sense that I should feel fortunate to be at the leadership table and did not need to be a contributing member of the team; unless the discussion was about race or the achievement gap.

R: So when did you go to your third school district, the one you are in now.

I: This is my third year in the ----- School District. I have approximately 2,500 students. My Free and Reduced Lunch is 89% and the student population is 96% African American.

The challenge to the job in ----- School District is often times stereotypical. I am often lumped or tied to the group [past superintendents]. The first year I keep hearing that my

predecessor was not- engaged with the staff or community and lacked the knowledge to move the district forward. He [African American male] did not seek the position of superintendent, but was appointed by the Board when they released the White male superintendent. I am a firm believer that people don't know that they don't know. Though the White superintendent was knowledgeable, there was no trust. Then there was the African American female who wasn't there long because she was caught taking the districts money.

**R:** How were you received by the parents and community?

**I:** I immediately got out into the community and asked questions of the parents and the community about the previous leaders in terms of their strong points and areas for improvement. The barriers that existed were due to the limited experiences the Board, staff, parents, and community had with superintendents. They were able to paint a picture of what to expect or not to expect.

**R:** What words of wisdom would you give to African American females who aspire to be superintendents?

**I:** Get a strong and knowledgeable mentor, someone who can not only guide you but open doors of opportunity for you. It does not matter if they are White, Black, male or female. It is expected that being African American, you will know how to address the achievement gap. If you don't you need to learn. Lastly, be thick skinned and let it roll off like water off a ducks back.

**R:** Thank you for your time, I have enjoyed talking with you.

**I:** As have I, take care.

**Dissertation Work – Joylynn Pruitt****Audio #2**

Key: R = Researcher

I = Interviewee #2

**R:** Are you knowledgeable that I am recording this interview?

**I:** Yes, I am.

**R:** In looking at your survey, it says that you have been in the field of education for 21 years. Is that correct?

**I:** That's correct.

**R:** In your career trajectory, you've been a teacher, an asst. principal, a principal and an asst. superintendent. Have all of your roles been in the same school district?

**I:** No, they have not.

**R:** Where were you a teacher?

**I:** I was a teacher in ----- School District.

**R:** And how many years were you there?

**I:** I was a teacher there for five or six years.

**R:** Did you experience during your time as a teacher in ----- School District any challenges and or barriers that you felt were attributed to your gender and/or your race?

**I:** I would say I experienced challenges more for my race than my gender.

**R:** How so?

**I:** I would say it was more indirect because of the way that I saw students being treated and I would acknowledge that. It wasn't directed towards me as an individual from the conflict or biases that I felt. I really saw it directed towards children which I then internalized and wanted to

become an advocate for those children and as a result there was push back on comments that conflict I experienced while I was there.

**R:** Where there many African American teachers when you were in ----- School District?

**I:** No, possible only three or four other than myself.

**R:** Do you recall what the student population was, in terms of racial make-up?

**I:** At the time, we participated in the Volunteer Transfer Program, and I do believe -----School District is still a part of that. So the majority of the Black student populations in my particular building were part of the desegregation program. However, the predominantly African American community in -----, which is called ----- Park, was still intact and the majority of those students were on the southern end of the district. These students were concentrated in one area. I was on North ----- Road, on the other end of that. If I had any diversity, it was coming from the desegregation program. I can only think of a couple of families that lived in the area where I worked.

**R:** Okay. Then you went on to be an assistant principal. Where were you as an assistant principal?

**I:** I was an assistant principal in ----- School District.

**R:** So talk to me about being an assistant principal at -----; what school were you at?

**I:** I was an assistant principal at ----- Elementary.

**R:** And what was that student demographic?

**I:** This is on a totally different planet compared to -----, and there was high poverty in that particular building, regardless of race. Everyone was very similar in terms of socioeconomics and there was a higher ELL population there. We had quite a few Spanish speaking students. I would say still it was predominately White, but you had a higher pop of African American



students there. The biggest issue was poverty more than anything in that community. For all students of color that was there, I had to be the advocate.

**R:** Was your principal male or Female?

**I:** She was female.

**R:** African American or Caucasian?

**I:** Caucasian.

**R:** Were you the first African American administrator in that building, do you know?

**I:** Yes, I was.

**R:** Do you feel that there were any challenges or barriers that you were presented because of your race or gender at that time?

**I:** That particular building was experiencing *extreme* issues and I came in at a challenging time; leadership was struggling. There was a lot of internal conflict between administration and the teachers and the parents. I took on more of a filter, I was trying to buffer a lot of the concerns that those different stakeholder groups were having with administration. I think I did not personally experience anything because the female that was in the role of building leader was having so many issues. So I was the one that had to support everyone and work through that and also support her so we could have a healthier building. But it was so much bigger than me and I was so young—I had just gotten this degree and moved into that position so I only stayed there a year. However, I have to preface that. Even within that dysfunctional context, I had some strange interactions with some of the families because of race. For example, when I first started, I was doing lunch duty and a student said “Oh, so you’re the new lady, you’re Black. I didn’t think you’d be Black.” You know how young people can be, speak what they know. It was not a comfortable feeling of acceptance and I would attribute that to what was going on, but

also on a micro level, like person-to-person, I would pick up some of those micro aggressions coming from the community and everything because I was African American, more so than any gender issues.

**R:** Were there other Black teachers in the building?

**I:** There were two Black teachers in the building.

**R:** I'm wondering if it was the first time many of them had seen a Black person in a position of leadership?

**I:** Yes, I would agree that was the case.

**R:** As African American women, it's common to see us in classrooms in the teaching position or even in the teaching aide position. The first time I went to work for ----- School District, I was coming in as a teacher; when I arrived, the principal told me that the aides show up the next day. I know while you said your district was a diverse community, I heard you say it was also a high poverty community. If you were the first African American administrator, I'm just wondering if the assumption was "Wow."

**I:** Yes, it was a surprise for some and they were taken aback by that. I never had any gender issues in my journey until now. It has been okay, there have been racial things along the way, but now as a superintendent, the gender issues are more prominent. It's like a totally different experience for me right now.

**R:** Where were you principal?

**I:** I was principal in ----- School District. I was an assistant principal and principal in -----  
---. I was only there a year.

**R:** What school and why only for a year?

**I:** I was assistant principal at ----- Oaks Elementary School. I was hired to help transition the principal because he was building a new elementary school called----- . I was moving to the new building off ----- Road.

**R:** So you went from assistant principal to principal at ----- Oaks?

**I:** No, that was a lateral move.

**R:** Did you experience any barriers or challenges while at ----- School District tied to race or gender?

**I:** It was more my race that presented the challenge. I had to learn and understand cultural things and that I would be perceived differently from my colleagues. I left there after a year at went to - ----- School District.

**R:** Then you went to --- in the ----- School District, as the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and now, superintendent. What has been your biggest challenge in moving your district forward, based on the perceptions that others have?

**I:** ----- School District is so different from any place that I've worked because it's been going through a transformation. All the other places were established, like ----- School District, and expectations from the community. ----- School District is a dichotomous community now. Student achievement then was like a flat line. There were people in the community who wanted to make a change. People in the community at that time said "We want something different"; they were supportive of it. People I served in the community were not in the same mindset as the people 15 years ago. There are a lot of issues in the community still, and it has been exhausting to try and mend that. I feel successful, I think we brought the community along, not just me physically but our communications. A big piece of getting to the next level is being out there and I call it shaking hands and kissing babies. It has been a huge initiative of

mine to be in my space, meaning ----- and -----, because it was tense. Moving forward, when more people started to move in, I wanted them to know the strong relationship between the school and the city—it wasn't a divorced relationship like it was before. Like I said before, I feel that it has been successful, the approach that we have taken, it's really helped things and helped us move forward and continue with the unique programming so families will support that; we've grown. It's just a different time and a different approach to speak to what you're talking about specifically. I think they welcome the difference in leadership style overall as a female. But, at the same time, I have received push back (like you're not included). It's not like a real demonstrative type of response but you're just not included and that is what it is, making sure your voice is at the table, and I'm saying this in very broad terms. I've never had this feeling before in my journey and I've had lots of experiences and this is different. Even working with partners, it takes, I believe, a lot longer because of the gender and age, and I was taken aback by it because I had never experienced it before. It comes in a variety of ways. It could be parents, a community partner, it could be the Board.

**R:** Let me ask you—in your survey, you say the greatest challenge you have encountered is with colleagues taking you seriously, and you say you believe it's attributed to your race and your age that have been obstacles. How so?

**I:** I think it's that inclusion piece, honestly. It just feels that way. I have elected out of some things and it's interesting how they go to certain people to get opinions about stuff and I don't agree with some things but I also don't have time to engage because of all of the stuff I have going on. I just worry sometimes in terms of peer groups, the direction some things are going, and it doesn't seem to be very diverse. I don't have time to fight it; I still have to do what I'm doing, but I feel like we're perpetuating the problem that's already in -- -----.

**R:** Sometimes I feel as though we get looked over in those meetings, that they don't see us as viable contributors, that they've made a decision, and that by virtue of the District's they lead, that's just how it's going to be.

**I:** It takes a great deal of effort for the Board to trust my judgment on a variety of things. I have to double and triple my efforts when I present information to them. I believe if I were a White male, expectations would be drastically different.

**R:** How so?

**I:** I think they would feel more comfortable with a White male telling them things that they don't want to hear. And I think if I were a man, this wouldn't be an issue when you're dealing with difficult things. When you're doing well all along and you've presented things, it should not be any different than that. I'm very thorough but I feel that when it comes to things that require the Board of Education to trust, they tend to second guess things. It's like, you've had all this all along, why are you second guessing a decision that I've made or to go behind my back and start talking to staff? It looks like we're divided, which isn't healthy for the organization. I don't know what to do with that. If you try and give them what they need, almost over communicate, then it is like "what are you doing?" I continue to work with my team; we give them [Board of Education] everything that they ask for and they need in order to make an informed decision but that's still not enough. And they can't even articulate what they want or what they need, and that's frustrating. It's like, "you don't like it, but you don't know why you don't like it," and what I'm making reference to is the communication that they need in order to make a decision.

**R:** You told me you've been in a couple of districts since you've moved up. As you've moved forward, do you feel that there have been any barriers to your upward mobility to the superintendency? You didn't think being a female was an issue until now. I don't want to

assume there've been no barriers tied to your mobility, but do you think there have been any barriers to your mobility?

**I:** If I were to move now to a superintendent's position, I think it would be, just because of the nature of this position and the Boards. I really don't feel as confident that it would be the same experience. I was fortunate in this particular move from assistant superintendent to superintendent that it was an internal move, and I had an opportunity to demonstrate what I could do, and that my predecessor was a female. It's interesting because Boards have a limited experience with the work on a micro level, and they're not supposed to, but they need to hire someone that can interface between micro and macro in the organization, and they have an impression of what the organization needs. I don't know if I could go behind a male superintendent, if they would feel confident about that. In the past, I felt that I could go in there and do what I needed to do. At the time, in each of my moves, the districts were really trying to make a conscious effort to have more diversity in their spaces. I was fortunate in that regard through my career. I was there at the right time, the right place, but I don't feel that it will always be that way. If I were to move to a different district, I think it would be more of an effort to try and move, especially here in --- ----. I don't think that if I were to try and look for another job that I would stay in --- ----. I would probably move. I have that sense that it wouldn't be like it was in the past. Because it is such a big leadership position that holds a lot of responsibility and power, it's going to be more intense to make that move.

**R:** If you knew of an aspiring African American female who wanted to be an assistant superintendent or superintendent; what would be some key professional growth opportunities that you would suggest to them? What type of mentorship should they seek out?

**I:** One thing that will help them considerably is that they need to understand school finances. I say that because most of us don't know the concepts of finance really that well because we're coming from different positions—Curriculum and Instruction, Human Resources, things of that nature. Coming into a district, I believe that women have the vision to move the district forward in that capacity, but school finances are very, very important. The ability to know and understand how to break down any of the financials and see where we need to go and what kind of changes we need to make in the district to leverage everything else, or to reconfigure your staffing models. Any of those things, you have to get and have a good feel for the money and how to work with your Board. That's probably where the mentoring comes from: how to work with the Board—nurturing, training, and receiving information. I think that's critical because that's going to make you or break you, [your management of the board]. How do you help them come up with protocols when working with the president and what is your succession plan, in terms of certain Board members leaving? You want to have diversity of thought, you want them to really understand how to have a vision and not get so much on a micro level, but stay on the macro level in a healthy way; and how they look at everything. And all of this is hard, because Boards don't always understand that walking into this position. Other advice I'd give aspiring African American females—before you get a job, you really need to understand the community that you're stepping into. Don't go into an interview if you really don't understand the community. You need to understand what the district and community values are and get a feel for what's been accomplished and where they want to go. Pay attention to the questions that you ask and the questions they ask you, because this job is so consuming. You want to be in a place that fits your own personal beliefs and where they want to go, you believe in that as well, and you help leverage whatever vision that they have for the district. Because if you don't believe in

it, it's going to be torture every day trying to get something you don't believe in, done. You don't want to be a part of something that you don't believe in because it's a lot of hours and a lot of time, and if you're in it, you're in it to win it. I would strongly recommend that as a young person going into the superintendency, they need to feel like this is where they belong because the superintendency is so important to them as well. Being a superintendent goes beyond just getting a paycheck, because you can't do that, it's just too consuming. Mentoring is incredibly important, not only do you need someone that is a mentor; you also need someone that is a sponsor. Your mentor can tell you specifics about the work and give encouragement on the ground level; but a sponsor is someone that can support you professionally to make another move, if you need to, or they're a recommendation, a person that has that level of power and who's got your back. Sometimes women get caught with their mentors, but they need a sponsor as well that is there for you and is that person that can say "she's the woman." You need to have that person there. You need someone to help you through some of the nitty gritty. Seeking out someone to be your mentor can be challenging, especially if you're in a new city. I cannot stress more than that. It's important to have mentors and also a sponsor.

**R:** I've learned so much from you. I want to thank you for your time and your energy. Is there anything that you would like to say in closing?

**I:** No, that's about it. Thank you for the opportunity. It has been my pleasure.



## **Dissertation Work – Joylynn Pruitt**

### **Audio #3**

Key: R = Researcher

I = Interviewee #3

**R:** You are aware that this interview is being recorded, is that correct?

**I:** Yes, I am aware that the interview is being recorded and will be used for your research.

**R:** Thank you for allowing this interview on such a nice Sunday afternoon.

**I:** No problem, I am just returning from a wonderful band concert in my district.

**R:** Great, my best days are when I can be with kids.

**I:** Absolutely, then you know today was a great day for me.

**R:** I do, I won't take up much of your time this evening, and thank you again for this opportunity.

**I:** You are more than welcome.

**R:** How long have you been in education?

**I:** I have been in education since 1972.

**R:** Did you start as a classroom teacher?

**I:** I started as a classroom teacher serving four years in -----, ----- as a visually impaired teacher. I decided to go back to school to finish my Masters in School Psychology. My supervisor at the time was not pleased with the work the current person was doing, so he encouraged me to apply for the position. The way the program was structured required one year of interning. My supervisor also suggested I get a Masters in School Administration. That summer I finished the program and applied to be a supervisor at the recommendation of my supervisor.

**R:** After only four years of teaching, WOW. What was your official title?

**I:** My title was K-12 Special Education Coordinator, Co-Principal. This position helped to shape me as an administrator.

**R:** Did you face any challenges or barriers tied to your race and or gender while serving in this position?

**I:** My biggest challenge was supervising former colleagues and social peers. I had to learn very quickly to separate the personal from the professional. However, I found often times that my colleagues and social peers could not.

**R:** How long did you serve in the position of K-12 Special Education Coordinator, Co-Principal?

**I:** After a year, I was asked to take on program for students with multiple disabilities. I learned that part of being a leader is not to know everything, but to choose people who do.

**R:** How long were you in this position?

**I:** I was in ----- for 16 years during that time I worked with and learned from extremely talented people.

**R:** It appears you started your administrative career early. How long have you been in administration? And where did you go when you left -----?

**I:** I have been an administrator since 1974. During that time I learned to negotiate, while in ----, I was offered a position in human resources, I said no, because all I ever knew was that it was always men and high school principals who served in human resources. I believe that human resources are the central mission of a school district. You hire the best in order to give children the best.

**R:** Where did you go from ----- and what was your role?

**I:** I moved to --- ----- due to my husband's job transfer. ----- School District had an opening in human resources, however, I just thought would go to --- ----- with my husband and be a teacher.

I decided however, to apply for the human resource and teaching positions and started that January in human resources where I held the position for six years. Who knew!

Can we pause I moment, my home phone is ringing.

**R:** Sure

**I:** Thanks, we don't get many calls on the house phone, so I thought I need to answer. Thanks for understanding. Now where did we leave off?

**R:** I was just about to ask, how did you end up in ----- School District?

**I:** I came to ----- School District because I really wanted to get back in K-12 system. When I first came to ----- School District to work in human resources, it was then human resources and student services. I worked in this capacity for three years and during that time I also worked on my doctorate. Four years later when the Board of Education decided to separate from the current superintendent [White female], I was appointed interim superintendent, then superintendent.

**R:** If you had not been appointed superintendent, would you have applied for the position?

**I:** If I had not been appointed would not have applied for position. When the district decided to post the position I was asked by the search firm to apply, my response was "no." When they conducted the search for the next superintendent and did not identify one; I accepted a two year interim position. This is hard work. I believed if I doing the job they [the Board] wanted, then they would appoint me as the superintendent, and I would not need to interview. If they had to continue the search, then there was something wrong.

**R:** Do you consider race and or gender played a role in you becoming the first African American superintendent in ----- School District?

**I:** I do not believe that race or gender played a factor in my becoming the first African American superintendent. When I was assistant superintendent for human resources, I was the first African

American administrator to work in the Central Office of the district. I was always asked how I got in to ----School District and be an African American especially for human resources. I was finalist against high performing candidate who the wife of the chancellor at ----- University. Human Resources at that time was a position for one of the members of the “good old boys” group. To my surprise I was actually welcomed by the network. Not sure why, maybe ‘they’ felt I needed guidance. I became a part of the group as other women came into the group; however, I was the only one who looked like me.

**R:** Why do you think you were hired for HR over the other candidate?

**I:** It was actually C.N. who also served as an assistant for human resources in ----- School District. C.N. called D.S. who was superintendent in -----School District at the time and told him if he did not hire me he was fool.

**R:** So you became the assistant superintendent, how was that for you as the first African American in Human Resources and more so the first African American in Central Office?

**I:** I was repeatedly asked, “How did you get this position in such a White affluent district?” I would always answer, “In order to be the best, I have to do my best.” You have to understand, while there were only a few females holding the position of director or assistant superintendent for human resources; I was the only one who looked like me. I kept receiving all kinds of advice, people telling I needed to hang out with the “Good Old Boys” so that I could learn from them. I personally did not first of all believe I needed advise to “hang out” and secondly, I felt I had been identified for the position, therefore, I must know something.

I remember attending the first area conference and thinking, I would try and hang out. I realized that I really did not want to play cards and drink in my conference sown time in order to be accepted by the group.

**R:** Is your superintendency in the same school district where you served as assistant superintendent?

**I:** Yes

**R:** Have you encountered any barriers or challenges since transitioning into the position of superintendent?

**I:** No, people were more accepting when I became superintendent they were when I became assistant for human resources. I am not sure, but I think it has to do with the fact that I was already in the district and people knew me or knew of me. I have not really had any challenges with in the district. I have however, had challenges from those outside of the district, especially my male counterparts. I believe in order to do the best I have to be the best.

**R:** When I first became the superintendent in ----- School district, I was easily accepted. The challenges I face as I female in the superintendent arena are different as the group of other superintendents is comprised mainly of white men who treat me as if I am a non-entity. At this point however, I have a job to do and really do not have time to care or engage in the foolishness of others.

**R:** You said earlier that your district is located in a predominantly White affluent neighborhood. How have the parents and broader community embraced you?

**I:** I really don't have any concerns or feel that I have been treated differently because of either my race or gender by my White parents. I did however; receive a different reception from my African American parents at the onset of my becoming superintendent. The African American parents were difficult and wanted me to solve their personal problems germane to their child. I was often told I needed to hire more Black teachers.

**R:** Did you have any mentors or sponsors on your road to becoming superintendent of schools?

**I:** I did, I had several along the way to becoming superintendent. My mentors, while formally were not identified as mentors, came from both races and genders and appeared at different points and times in my career. They always seemed to see in me traits I did not readily see in myself. Yet they all knew when to give me that “push.”

I am going to have to close soon; my family is home and ready for dinner.

**R:** Before closing, what words of advice would you offer to other African American females who aspire to become public school district superintendents?

**I:** Having a mentor or coach is a viable component that can assist in attaining the superintendency. It is important to have someone who has been a superintendent in order to be able to seek guidance on finance, board relationships, community relationships, and just being able to navigate the roles and challenges of the position. I also professional development in key in the development of a competent leader; one that is a visionary leader well versed in strategic planning, engaging the community in working together with all stakeholders, communications, and school finance.

I would stress the important role they have a superintendent of schools and are tasked with the job of changing the lives of children.

**R:** I want to thank you for your time this evening, take care.

**I:** You too, take care.

**Dissertation Work – Joylynn Pruitt****Audio #4**

Key: I = Interviewee # 4

R= Researcher

**R:** You are knowledgeable that I am recording this interview?

**I:** Yes, I understand this interview is being recorded

**R:** You are a superintendent in -----, is that correct?

**I:** Yes, ma'am.

**R:** Is this your first superintendency?

**I:** Yes, it is.

**R:** Okay and how long have you been superintendent?

**I:** I have been superintendent for three years.

**R:** How many years have you been in education, total?

**I:** I would say approximately 22 years.

**R:** Excellent. And how many years of administrative experience prior to your superintendency?

**I:** Almost 15 years in administration. I was principal for 8years, then assistant superintendent, then superintendent.

**R:** Has all your administrative experience been in the same district?

**I:** Yes it has.

**R:** Why superintendent?

**I:** I have been educated with a strong view of equality and that I can be whatever I want to become. All I remember is my mother stressing the importance of getting a good education so

that I could take care of myself. She often told me, as a Black female I would always have to work harder. While, the issues of race and gender were always there I learned to use them to affirm my capabilities and my ability to accomplish my dreams. I did not view the position of the superintendency as highly coveted or something which I could not attain because I believed that if I just focused all my energies into it, I would certainly win.

**R:** So, were you an internal candidate? Did you have a mentor or a sponsor who assisted you on your journey to the superintendency?

**I:** Well the superintendents that I worked with as an administrator, because I've only worked in the district where I work now. I was hired by the superintendent as he started his superintendency and I worked with him as the principal and assistant superintendent until he retired; then I took over as superintendent.

**R:** What size is your district?

**I:** About 5,543 students.

**R:** Pre-K-12?

**I:** Yes, Pre-K-12.

**R:** What is your student demographic?

**I:** We're 80% African American and 20% Caucasian/Asian Pacific Islander.

**R:** Oh okay, wonderful. Are you the first female superintendent?

**I:** No, I am the first African American female superintendent.

**R:** Was your predecessor African American or Caucasian?

**I:** African American male.

**R:** With that being said, you stated do you perceive you faced any barriers and challenges to attaining your superintendency?



**I:** I have experienced more racial challenges in my path. I have had to be firm in my stance regarding decisions I have made and continue to make. I notice that my Caucasian counterparts are not questioned nor scrutinized nearly as much. I have also experienced sexism. It is very interesting that men don't believe women can be as if not more intelligent than they are. I have had to share my knowledge and experience along the way to assist my male counterparts in understanding that we deserve administrative roles as much as they do. In addition, I have had to demand respect throughout my career; mainly because I have been a young administrator, but in some instances it has been my race and gender. I am blessed to be where I am and dedicated to mentoring others along this path as I have been mentored.

**R:** Were there any other African American principals?

**I:** At the time that I became superintendent, I was the first African American superintendent in our district; the board of education for the school district where I worked indicated the district was not yet ready for a female to lead them and definitely not an African American female. I believe the opportunities for the advancement of female aspirants, African American, White or other, while better, is not much better today than during the 1990's. The demand for quality instruction, increased student performance, and quality leaders is on the rise. Regardless, in reality, it is still a stiff challenge to pursue and attain public school district superintendency. Even though I have successful superintendents as mentors, I still have a tough time climbing up the ladder of advancement. And search firms, well they still instantly approach males over females to serve as mentors to fledgling candidates.

**R:** As you started to enter the world of administration and your trajectory to the superintendency, did you experience any barriers or challenges that you perceive were tied to being either African American or being a female?

**I:** I experienced barriers based on race and gender. My approach has been to remain as I am. I will not patronize people or play by their rules, whims or preferences. If they do not like me, then so be it. I will not change myself just because others dislike me. I speak for what I believe and for children. I will tackle the issues which I feel important to the education of the students and parents. Even when I know that there is a small circle to which I do not belong or will ever be part of, so what? It is always interesting to identify men who are attempting to manipulate me, but I am not supposed to be intelligent enough to recognize the manipulation. I have become a master of this particular strategy.

**R:** Did you aspire to be a superintendent or was it something that your predecessor saw in you and encouraged you to become a superintendent?

**I:** No I really did not aspire to be superintendent absolutely; it just sort of evolved for me. I was always lauded for doing great work or what seemed to just come naturally for me. To tell the truth, I was preparing to leave the district when I was asked by the Board not to leave as the superintendent at that was about to tender his/her intent to not return the upcoming year.

**R:** So you were appointed as superintendent, you didn't have to apply?

**I:** No, I did not apply, I was appointed.

**R:** Wonderful. That just speaks volumes to the work that you've done during your time in the district, and being there three years really validates that.

**I:** School administrators who don't accept me because of the color of my skin or my gender haven't affected my self-worth at all. I know and I accept who I am and what I am and what I have accomplished. This means I have to segregate my personal and my professional life. I am attuned to my own personal development. No one can make me feel more or less than I really am. I am not also affected by how people perceive me. I don't get affected by them because I

know who I am. I don't indulge them with it, but I have learned how to proceed from here and how to get where I want to go. My self-worth is not attached to my being Black or being a woman.

**R:** Of all the superintendents I've interviewed, most of them are saying that race and gender did *not* appear to be a problem until they became superintendents, and it was with their other superintendent colleagues, because a vast majority of them were white males. However, I know enough about ----- to know that it has the ----- percentage of African American superintendents in the Midwestern region, which is the area for my study; and I know that you have a strong African American female and male superintendent contingency. None of them saw race as too much of an issue.

With what you know now, of your experience as an African American superintendent, what would you say are the most important things in terms of professional development for African American females who aspire to be superintendents? What would you say to them that they really need to focus on? What are some key pieces and skills they need to bring to the table?

**I:** In a strong contrast with private business, in education the most qualified and educated individuals are not always the ones who attain the high level positions. As a result, trying to sort out your way through the career ladder and achieve positive outcomes required more creativity. The need to know finance would have truly been beneficial to my advancement. Anyone aspiring to the superintendency would be well served to engage in professional development centered on finance.

Women now enjoy privileged posts in most areas of social circles. To do so, however, they have to overcome the barriers of sex and race or at least be more resourceful or wiser in terms of getting what they want. I know the inequalities still persist, but changes are seen. You just have

to make a conscious effort to not mind it at all and be committed to doing what needs to be done in spite of everything else.

I believe that successful candidates must deliberately find time to research; visit the district, schools, and community where they intend to apply. Others also have professional consultants who work on their personal data, resumes, and prompt or coach them on excellent professional interview responses. Know yourself and assess your strengths and weaknesses. You must study your potential school district very well. One must be very ready and on point during interviews. By knowing the district, it includes knowing the people in the community and the personnel in the district. Lastly, female aspirants should work hard; contextualize their leadership styles, approach to work, and ethics as to how the school district works

**R:** I really appreciate the time you've given me. I appreciate your time, your insight; it will help me in my research. Thank you so much.

**I:** Good luck.

**R:** Thank you.

**I:** Thank you!

## **Dissertation Work – Joylynn Pruitt**

### **Audio #5**

Key: I = Interviewee # 5

R = Researcher

**R:** By participating in this survey, you do realize that you are being recorded?

**I:** Yes, absolutely, I am aware this interview is being recorded.

**R:** This is connected to research on the underrepresentation of African American female public school superintendents breaking through the glass ceiling of race and gender.

It says here in your survey that you have been in the field of education for 20 years. Including your superintendency, you've been an administrator for eight years.

**I:** Yes, that correct.

**R:** That means you were a classroom teacher for only twelve years?

**I:** Yes, actually eleven and a half. I was a first grade teacher for ten years and then I did a third grade placement for a year and a half, and then a half a year as an assistant principal.

**R:** Was that the first half of the year or the second half?

**I:** It was the latter part of the year.

**R:** May I ask what happened to cause you to go into that assistant principal position halfway through the year?

**I:** Yes, it was a promotion. I was excited. I applied and I got the job. So I left the third grade classroom going into assistant principal.

**R:** And this is your first year in your current position?

**I:** I'm sorry, let me finish that. So I did half a year as assistant principal and finished out that year. Then I became a principal of an elementary school with 700 students, all intercity, about

90% African American, and economically disadvantaged students, and I served there for three years. This restructured and I was challenged to go and start a new elementary school. So I did that, my staff had an opportunity to choose where they would like to be placed for the next year and I'm glad to say that 90% of our staff followed me and the other 10%, we agreed to go our separate ways. It was a mutual agreement. I was there for a year, as the new elementary principal and so then I was promoted to Leader of Elementary Education after that, which is kind of like a supervisory position for elementary.

**R:** So you were put over all of elementary?

**I:** Fifteen elementary schools and one Pre-K center.

**R:** So what was your title, then?

**I:** Leader of Elementary Education. I did that for two and a half years. The last part of my stint in -----county, I became Chief Academic Officer. So in December of 2013 I was promoted from Leader of Elementary Schools to Chief Academic Officer. From December to May, I was Chief Academic Officer and then in May 2014, I became superintendent of ----- public schools.

**R:** In the same school district?

**I:** No, in the neighboring school district.

**R:** What's the name of your school district?

**I:** ----- City Schools.

**R:** So you were an external candidate. You saw it on the website or did you go through a search firm? It says both.

**I:** I attended the ----- Board Association Academy for Superintendents, so once I finished that training, I'm always on their email roster for potential jobs, so I received it through the TBAA email list.

**R:** Do you know how many candidates there were?

**I:** I'm not sure how many applied, but there were five that interviewed, then they voted.

**R:** Do you know if you were the only female and the only African American?

**I:** There were three African American females and two were from the system, currently.

**R:** Are they still there?

**I:** One of them is still here, she's a principal here.

**R:** What happened to the other?

**I:** She was in the district office. She had served as an interim superintendent for maybe a half year and she was on a 120 day contract because she had retired and came back. I just didn't renew her contract.

**R:** Okay. So you kind of just ascended to the superintendency on your own; there were no mentors. Did you have a female superintendent support group that encouraged you?

**I:** I did not have a support group and when I was in -----/----- county schools—my last district—there was. She was the only African American superintendent in ----- other than me, and she was very supportive, and she still has been. I'm not sure if you're aware of that, that there are only two of us in -----.

**R:** I am.

**I:** She's really been my mentor.

**R:** In -----, there's only----- of us. I am the longest sitting African American superintendent right now in -----.

So she's served as your mentor. Are your districts in close proximity?

**I:** Yes, about fifteen minutes apart.

**R:** Are you guys anywhere near ----- or -----?

**I:** We are east of -----, about 65 miles east.

**R:** You're 43, which is relatively young for a superintendent. In your journey to the superintendency, was there ever a time where you felt as though your age, your race or your gender played a part in your trajectory. I see in your survey you said people think because you're young, you weren't ready. Evidently your Board didn't think that, because they hired you. You're the fourth female in the state of ----- but it's predominantly white. Was your predecessor African American or Caucasian?

**I:** My predecessor was Caucasian. Here in -----, I'm the first African American superintendent and the first female. I really think for this position, age is a factor. It wasn't the night that I was hired because they really wanted change, but just in interviewing for other superintendent's positions, I felt like it did matter. I was a finalist several times, once in ----- and twice here in ----- . So I really felt like age was a factor in that, and possibly race for two of them. Gender is a big one as well because we are breaking through barriers so our role is unique and always under microscope.

**R:** I am the second African American female here, the other one was in the seventies and I think she stayed maybe sixteen months, if that long. But I do believe that for me, it wasn't age, it wasn't my race, but it was definitely my gender, because the perception was as a female, I would have a difficult time terminating people, and I have actually terminated more people in my tenure than the previous four superintendents. And some of those people I've terminated have



been administrators. But that was what the Board said to me—"We don't think you can make the hard decisions."

I see that you have said you have to work harder; you had to hold your Doctorate degree to even be considered.

**I:** Absolutely. And I am still being questioned because I have an Ed.D. I had a Board member just last week say to me "Well, your degree is not as high as a Ph. D."

**R:** That's because they don't know. When you have an Ed. D., you're a practitioner, you're actually doing the work, and Ph. D.'s are more philosophical and theoretical.

**I:** Here's a guy who has a GED and questioning my degree. He's made the comment before that I don't know my place, being that I'm a woman, and so my five Board members should be able to tell me what to do and I should do it, and that I just don't know my place. I was offended by that.

**R:** Oh, I guess so. Your district is about the size of mine. So you only have five Board members. That is interesting. Are they all men?

**I:** Yes. How many do you have?

**R:** We have seven, and they are elected Board. They come in for rotational three year terms. So I'm making the assumption: the person who told you didn't know your place, African American or Caucasian?

**I:** African American. I have not had problems from the white community; my problems have been from the black community.

**R:** What were some of those problems?

**I:** I'd have to say that the initial problems were about the two black ladies that were here. Several people wanted them to be superintendent, so just welcoming a stranger in was a problem because everybody had their favorites.

**R:** So the black community wanted one of the two other ladies.

**I:** Correct.

**R:** So you've been there since July 1?

**I:** Actually they brought me in May 1 to do the budget, and I got to do my own budget.

**R:** So do you have a one year contract or three year contract?

**I:** I have a three year contract.

**R:** So I'm going back—your predecessor was a white male. You're the first African American and the first female.

**I:** Correct.

**R:** So this is a total cultural change for your community.

**I:** It really is.

**R:** So do you have an executive cabinet?

**I:** I do.

**R:** And what's the makeup of your cabinet?

**I:** I have nine members, and one is black.

**R:** And you have between 1,000 and 5,000 students. Do you know your approximate number?

**I:** 1,200 students.

**R:** And you're a K-12 district?

**I:** Pre-K-12.

**R:** So what are some of the things you are doing to bridge that barrier that exists, by virtue of being female and African American?

**I:** It's been quite interesting; I've been -----at myself in the community, that's one thing. I'm available if they need me, whenever they invite me somewhere; I make it my business to show up. I've been attending churches, all kinds of churches, events (Black Museum Fundraiser, the NAACP as a speaker, and Relay for Life). I show up for every event and I've started making donations to specific organizations and people are starting to see that I'm invested in the community because I'm spending that quality time with them.

**R:** So let's talk about staff now. What is the racial makeup of your staff?

**I:** It's about 80/20 (80% Caucasian). And that's a big pill to swallow for the black community, because one Board member has made the statement that he would like me to fire all the white staff at the district office and hire all blacks. I understand they really want diversity, but you have to do it the right way. There are a lot of trust issues and division amongst the community of white and black here, it's really racially divided. But I have been accepted first by the white community and now the black community; they're warming up to me.

**R:** In your upward mobility to the superintendent, you spent a very short time in the classroom, then you became an assistant principal for a very short time, and then you really started to climb the ranks. I also heard you say you had applied for several superintendencie's, and you were a finalist, and you said you felt that your non-selection was tied to your race, gender, and age. Do you think that if you had gone somewhere else in your state that it would have been different?

**I:** I think it would have been different, probably up north, but in the south, it's always a problem for minority women. I can't tell you how many events I've been to where I'm the only black woman.

**R:** So the south is difficult, but you think if you were in the north, it would not have been?

**I:** I don't think it would have been as difficult for me. One thing I can say that I think helped is because of my first school, my only placement as a teacher; I did my entire placement in one school building. It was considered the elite school of the district and very few minorities taught there. I had a very good representation as an outstanding teacher, being one that everyone could get along with. Those relationships that I built at that school with teachers, community leaders and parents are my foundation of who I am. I don't have to run and tell who I am, they all do it for me, and I guarantee you that's why I'm sitting where I am today, it's because of those relationships that I've built with the right people.

**R:** So while you did not have a concrete mentor, you would have what we call many sponsors, people who are spreading your story.

**I:** Absolutely. They've all been Caucasian people, mostly because people in the black community were not as accepting. There was a lot of jealousy trying to hinder my career, so I would say that most of the people who I built those really good relationships with were Caucasian people. They were accepting of me wanting to better myself and they helped elevate my career.

**R:** The biggest barriers and challenges I've had in my career have been from women who look like me.

**I:** Absolutely. I promised myself I'd never work for another black female because it was so typical. I'm originally from Arkansas and I grew up in the white community and a lot of times I was the only black in the classroom, so I grew up learning how to fit in. I attended ----- College, which is an HBCU and that really changed my perspective on a lot of things and allowed me to

relate to a lot of people. It really changed my world that I can encompass both cultures and it's just really been a great foundation for me.

**R:** So you really had to learn how to be socially and culturally diverse.

**I:** Correct. Even though I'm from a large family, we lived in a community where there were not a lot of blacks.

**R:** What made you go to a historically black college?

**I:** Well, we're Christian Methodists by religion, and I really wanted that experience in college. I wanted a different culture and then a Christian faith culture. And my mom was a minister.

**R:** I understand. There are young females who aspire to be superintendents. If you could say anything to them what would it be? What's critical in terms of professional growth and development for aspiring African American females who aspire to be superintendents that would help them be successful? What would you say to females in general but particularly African American females who want to do the work that we do? What can they do to help prepare themselves to do this work?

**I:** There are a few things I'd probably say to a younger version of myself: networking is very important, build a very strong network of people you can rely upon and call upon in the time of need. And even if it's not the time of need, but just to learn from. Building those very important relationships with people will get you through the tough times, so you will need that solid foundation. Another thing is be well versed in education law. Know what to do and when to do it, and most importantly, know what not to do. A lot of times, we'll know all the right things, but we don't know what not to do. That's very important. Make the main thing the main thing. If your values are intertwined with what the school's mission is, that's a good thing. But if it's not, then have everybody on board with your vision. You've got to go out and get support just to

buy in, because you can't do it by yourself. You're going to have to learn how to get the Board members on your side—they can either make or break you; and I wasn't aware of all the issues about Board members, so that had been a challenge for me in the beginning. I would say we have a better relationship now because we all understand where we're headed. But it took me going out and having those crucial conversations about what's important to me, tell me what's important to you, and then we try to have a consensus as a group. That has been helpful.

**R:** I know that you're from Arkansas, transplanted to Tennessee. Did you relocate because of your position in teaching or your husband?

**I:** I grew up in Arkansas and I came to ----- College in -----, -----, and my entire education career has been in -----, -----.

**R:** Would you give them any advice about the balance between family and the workplace, in work as a female superintendent? Do you have any words that you would share regarding finding that balance?

**I:** Just like you make time for work, make time for family. The way that I try to do that is put it on my calendar. Somebody's going to miss out if you don't try to have an even balance.

**R:** In aspects of the job, some of the people I've interviewed said they need to know finance, strategic planning. Somebody told me "Know the community inside and out where you want to be superintendent. Is there any knowledge in skill set that they need to bring to the table? Is there anything you'd like to add to those sentiments?"

**I:** I would ditto everything that they said because you have to know finance, education law, strategic planning, you have to have all of those skills. But the most important skill you have to have is a love for children and you have to make sure you're a visionary for children. Know how to treat people, because everybody wants to be around the superintendent, everybody wants your

time, and you have to give it. It's kind of like being a superstar and you're always "on." Always. That was difficult for me to get used to—every time I stepped outside of my house, I was no longer myself, I was the superintendent. I only have peace within my home or within my church; peace of having downtime.

**R:** We've gone through my questions. Thank you so much.

**I:** You're welcome, anytime. It's been such a pleasure.

**R:** Thank you.

**Dissertation Work – Joylynn Pruitt****Audio #6**

Key: I = Interviewee # 6

R= Researcher

**R:** You are knowledgeable that I am recording this interview?

**I:** Yes ma'am, I am.

**R:** You are a superintendent in -----, is that correct?

**I:** Yes, ma'am.

**R:** Is this your first superintendency?

**I:** Yes, it is.

**R:** Okay and how long have you been superintendent?

**I:** Six years.

**R:** How many years have you been in education, total?

**I:** Thirty-five years.

**R:** Wonderful. And how many years of administrative experience prior to your superintendency?

**I:** Almost 25 years in administration. I was principal for thirteen years, then assistant superintendent, then superintendent.

**R:** Has all your administrative experience been in the same district?

**I:** Yes it has.

**R:** So, you were an internal candidate. Did you have a mentor or a sponsor who assisted you on your journey to the superintendency?

**I:** Well the superintendents that I worked with as an administrator, because I've only worked in the district where I work now. I was hired by the superintendent as he started his



superintendency and I worked with him as the principal and assistant superintendent until he retired; then I took over as superintendent.

**R:** What size is your district?

**I:** About 3,000 students.

**R:** Pre-K-12?

**I:** Yes, Pre-K-12.

**R:** What is your student demographic?

**I:** We're about 68% Latino, probably about 30% African American and 2% Caucasian/Asian Pacific Islander.

**R:** Oh okay, wonderful. Are you the first female superintendent?

**I:** Yes I am.

**R:** Was your predecessor African American or Caucasian?

**I:** Caucasian male.

**R:** So are you the first African American female and first African American superintendent?

**I:** Yes.

**R:** With that being said, you stated this is the only district you've been in; and your trajectory was a teacher, and I think you said principal, then assistant superintendent, correct?

**I:** No, This is not the only district I've worked in. I worked as a teacher in ----- Public Schools and for the State of -----, where I was a Special Education teacher. I worked for the State of -- ----- at a residential school for Physically Disabled Children for about six years. Then I went to City of ----- again as a Special Education teacher. I came to my current district as a teacher. I was also an administrator in my current district.

**R:** Okay, great. So you were building principal in your current district as well?

**I:** Yes, that is correct.

**R:** Were there any other African American principals?

**I:** At the time that I became superintendent, I was the first African American superintendent in our district, the first female superintendent in our district, and the first female principal in our district. At the time I started there were no other African American principals, no. By the time I left the principalship to become superintendent, there was another African American female principal and an African American male who became a principal when I left the principalship to become assistant superintendent.

**R:** As you started to enter the world of administration and your trajectory to the superintendency, did you experience any barriers or challenges that you perceive were tied to being either African American or being a female?

**I:** Well, of course I experienced barriers based on race and gender. I don't think that for me, the barriers were particularly pronounced in terms of work, community, and district and my colleagues there. I became the first African American female in administration in our district as a principal; of course that was a change for the community and the district, and so there were some adjustments that had to take place there and working with the teachers. But there were no challenges or barriers with the other administrators. Now, with the Board, I've always felt that I had the support of the district administration when I was a principal and throughout all of the years, we've worked with a really supportive, cooperative, and collaborative Board of Education. I've always felt that I was supported by them.

**R:** Okay. What is the makeup of your Board?

**I:** Over the years, it's been different kinds of makeup, but our Board is a pretty stable Board right now. The Board president has been a member of the Board of Education now for twenty-six

years in the fall, so she's been on the Board ever since I've worked in the district and she's been President of the Board of Education for about twenty of those years.

Right now, the makeup of the Board of Education is three women, four men. Five of the members of the Board are Caucasian, then there's one African American male and one Latino male. They are Board elected [and one of our long serving members has decided to retire from the Board because of her health, so] beginning this spring, we will have four Caucasian members, two Latino members and one African American member.

**R:** You mentioned when you became superintendent, you felt supported by the other administrators and the Board. However, there was some adjustment for the community; in what aspect?

**I:** I didn't feel that was so when I became superintendent, however, it was when I became principal. I became principal in our district twenty-five years ago. I was the first woman, the first African American person that worked as an administrator in our district, when I became principal in our district. I think not so much at my school, but for some of the other communities it was a change to see someone who looked different. From time to time in our district, the principals are reassigned to different schools, although I never was. I had the feeling early on that some of the schools were a little bit hesitant because they thought at some point I might be transferred to their school and they'd never experienced anything like that. But the system got over that and after I'd been there for a while. We hired a district administrator last year who took on one of the toughest spots in the district as an admin and she said to me that she remembers when she interviewed and what she thought was remarkable in the interview was that there was one Caucasian male on the interview team and he was the person who stood out; she just was impressed at the diversity of the administrator team.

Once people realize that it really doesn't make any difference, it really is about who the person is and the kind of work they do, then there are no issues. So now, when we reassign principals or someone goes to a different school, I just never get questions anymore to have conversations with parents about who the principal is in terms of their race, culture or anything like that. I think over the years, we have enculturated (?) the community to accept diversity and to try to embrace that.

**R:** Wonderful. You indicated that you've been in the district for twenty-five years. Did you aspire to be a superintendent or was it something that your predecessor saw in you and encouraged you to become a superintendent?

**I:** Absolutely, it was him encouraging me towards that because during the years that I worked in the district. I have hereditary hip malformation and at the end of my term as principal I had to have my hip replaced and as I recovered from the hip replacement the superintendent called me and asked if I wanted to come to work at the administrative center as an assistant superintendent. I never applied for it, he just called me and asked if I wanted to do it and I said yes; he said that was great and when you come back, I'll come there and we'll do some reassignments to determine who would be principal at the school I was leaving. Then, while I was assistant superintendent, my mother became ill with dementia and shortly before her death, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, about three months before she died. The superintendent was planning his retirement probably a few years before, and he had mentioned to me that the Board was interested in whether or not I wanted to become superintendent after he retired. I actually told him no, I couldn't take that on because now my attention needed to be on the care of my mother because she had dementia, and I wouldn't be able to devote the time to the position that was necessary. A few months later my mother passed away. The superintendent came to me

again and said the Board was still interested in having me become superintendent if I was interested in doing that. This time I told him that I would and that was that.

**R:** So you were appointed as superintendent, you didn't have to apply?

**I:** Correct, I did not apply, I was appointed.

**R:** Wonderful. That just speaks volumes to the work that you've done during your time in the district, and being there six years really validates that.

**I:** I think my experience with race and gender is not as intense as the experiences of some people who are seeking the superintendency in districts where they have not worked and where they do not have a reputation with the community, the Board, the administration, and the schools. It's different when you're going someplace and you're not known there—they don't know you and you don't know them. When you're going to a place as a new person and you have to carry out the duties of the superintendency. Those responsibilities or the things you have to do are not always the kind of things that give you strong initial relationships with people; you have to do a lot of things. But in a district where you've been working for a long time, they already know that you've done some things that everybody really appreciates and you have to do some things that are hard that people don't like so much. And they just take it all, because they have the mentality of you over twenty-five years. I don't know if it's the same if you do someplace new.

**R:** Of all the superintendents I've interviewed, most of them are saying that race and gender did *not* appear to be a problem until they became superintendents, and it was with their other superintendent colleagues, because a vast majority of them were white males. However, I know enough about ----- to know that it has the ----- percentage of African American superintendents in the Midwestern region, which is the area for my study; and I know that you

have a strong African American female and male superintendent contingency. None of them saw race as too much of an issue.

With what you know now, of your experience as an African American superintendent, what would you say are the most important things in terms of professional development for African American females who aspire to be superintendents? What would you say to them that they really need to focus on? What are some key pieces and skills they need to bring to the table?

**I:** I think for anyone who is going to be working in any kind of education leadership today, I think you have to have very, very strong knowledge of curriculum leadership. I don't think you can avoid curriculum leadership, I don't think you can delegate it to someone else and not know what should be happening with that. All the aspects of curriculum leadership from the subject area information that the children need to have an opportunity to experience, understanding all of the standards and the revision of standards as they change and different expectations are going to be in place for the students. I think also really strong knowledge of assessment in the curriculum realm is really, really important. In -----, we have a very strong and legislative participation in education planning, but it's there, so I think you have to be kind of politically aware—not kind of, I think you have to be very politically aware—of changes that are happening legislatively that are going to affect the things that schools have to do and that you are going to need. I think aspirants really need to understand what it's going to take to have your staff become accepting of continuous improvement and continuous change and continuous professional development for themselves, so that they're always going to be on top and on the cutting edge of what's happening in terms of educational practices, curriculum, and instruction practices in the schools. You have to go through those things yourself and get that training so that when you're working with the staff and talking to them about it, there are things they know that you're not just talking

about them, but you've been there and you're going through that with them. I would recommend that for anyone who is moving forward as any kind of educational leader.

In terms of working with colleagues, the other African American superintendents in the area I work with they tend to be more transient and they aren't in their district for a long time—the district hires them, then let them go and all kinds of different things which are totally different from my district because we have long standing Board members and long standing administrators. Usually when administrators leave us, it's because we decide they weren't going to continue and they've been there only a brief time, or we just determine they weren't going to work well with us. Or, they leave because they got some other opportunity, so we're trying to help them do that if they have a great opportunity and we don't want to have them miss out on something that's going to be good for them in the long run. I think that you want to try to develop relationships and work with the people who are around you. In my case, in the superintendent's organization for the region of the ----- Association of Superintendents, in my area, I'm the only African American woman who is at the meetings. But I don't focus on that and I don't think they focus on that. I'm a member of the executive Board in the region and I go to the meetings, I help plan things that are happening to superintendents in our area and I work with them as colleagues, and that's how I've felt that they work with me. I don't have any hesitation in expressing what my views are. If they don't accept that, they'd never indicated that to me in any way, so I don't get any feedback about it.

You have to prepare yourself for working with everyone, be aware that gender and race issues have a lot to do with how you're accepted and perceived by other people. There are things going on that you may be completely unaware of, where people may be trying to undermine you, because you're a woman, or African American, or *both*. But don't be paranoid about that or let

that become something that separates you from being effective with working with the members of your community or your colleagues. If there was someone in our region who was openly racist or gender prejudice, I don't believe they would be accepted by the other members of the group; I think that they would probably get called out on that, but not because there's not gender or race prejudice in the others, but that they know how to keep that in check on the job. We're all working in communities in our region where we're serving very, very diverse communities, and everybody needs to be figuring out effective ways to do that.

If I was a woman starting out, trying to find other successful African American female superintendents, I'd try to establish a relationship with that person, so you have someone to talk to about things.

**R:** I really appreciate the time you've given me. I appreciate your time, your insight; it will help me in my research. Thank you so much.

**I:** Good luck with your research and with coming to the end of your dissertation.

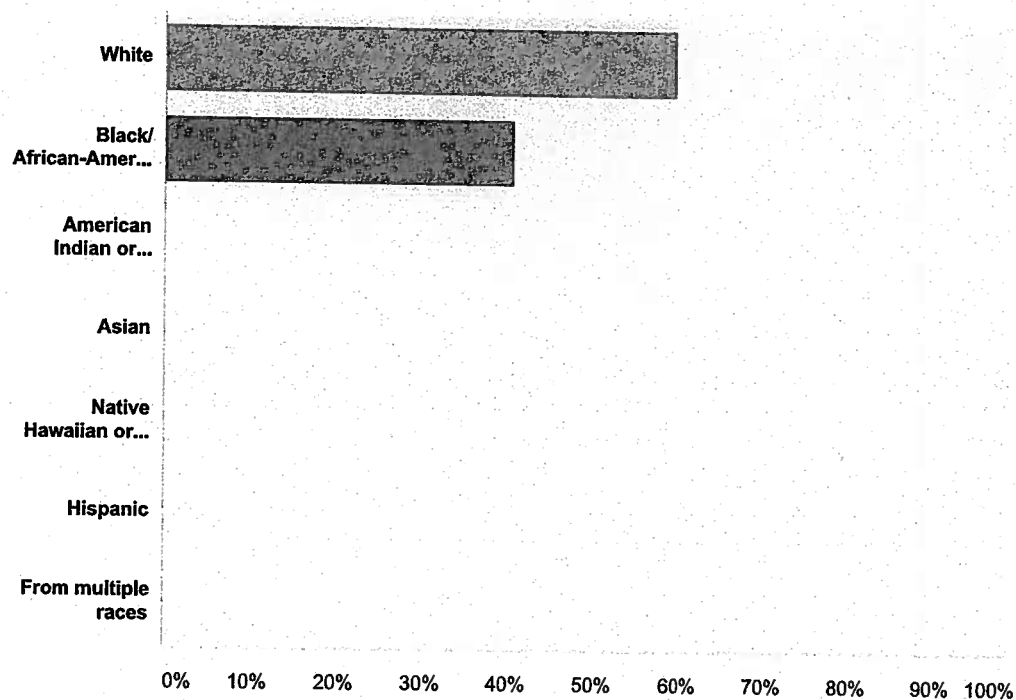
**R:** Thank you and good luck in the next part of your future. I wish you the best in your retirement.

**I:** Thank you!



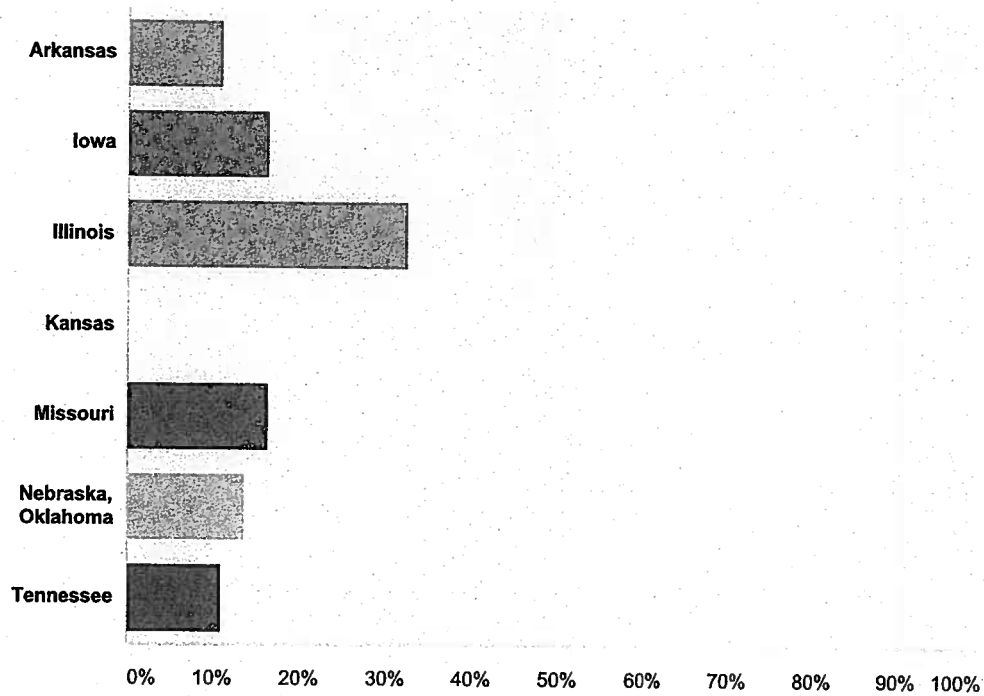
## Appendix D

### Survey Results

**Q1 Describe your Race/Ethnicity.**

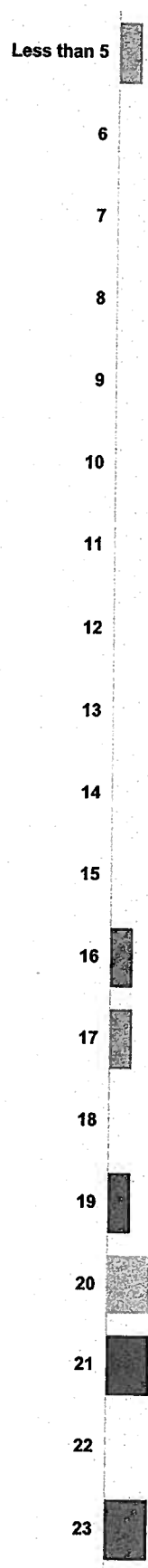
Answer Choices	Responses
White	59.46%
Black/ African-American	40.54%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.00%
Asian	0.00%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.00%
Hispanic	0.00%
From multiple races	0.00%

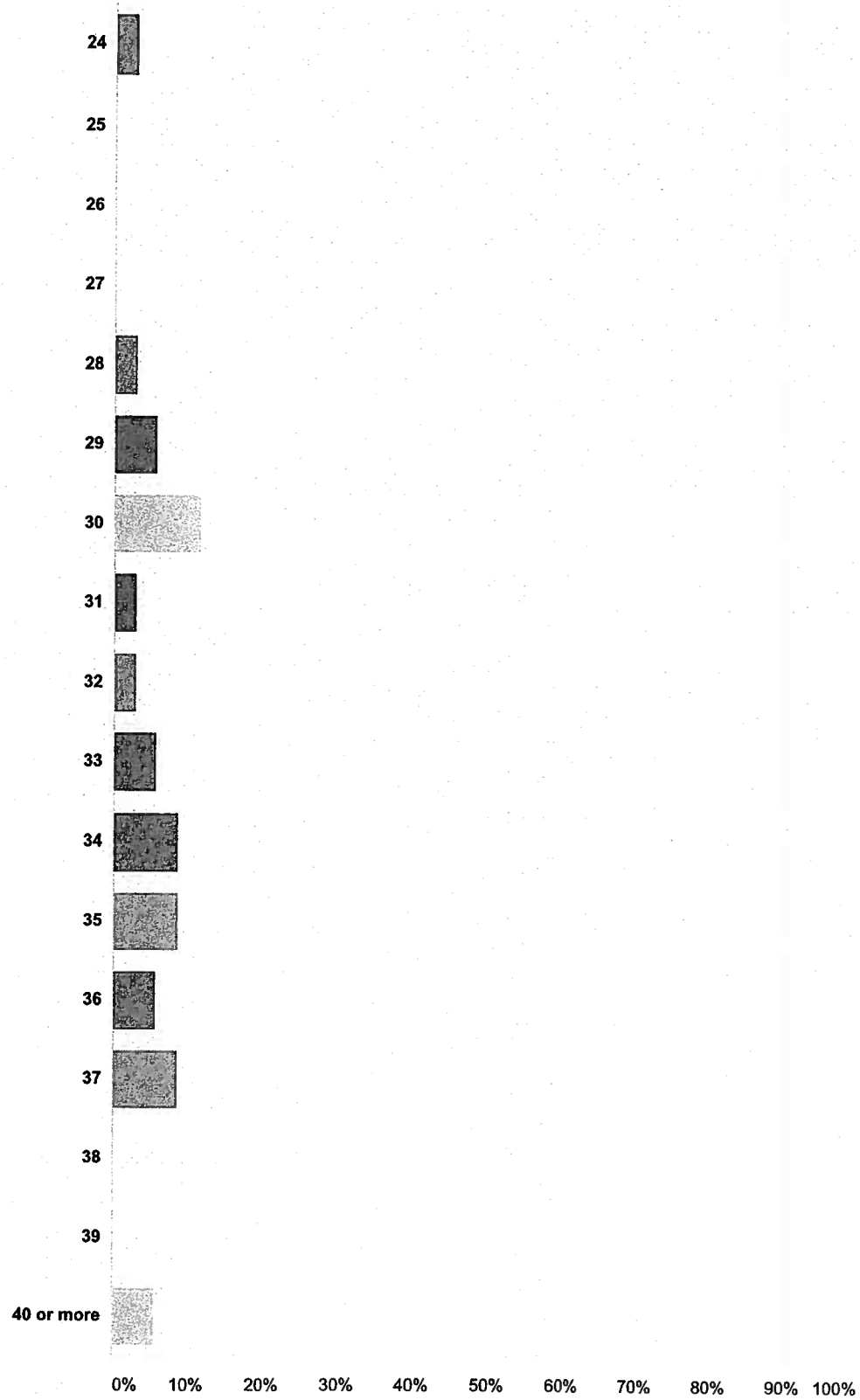
## Q2 In what state are you currently a superintendent?



Answer Choices	Responses
Arkansas	10.81%
Iowa	16.22%
Illinois	32.43%
Kansas	0.00%
Missouri	16.22%
Nebraska, Oklahoma	13.51%
Tennessee	10.81%

Q3 Years in the field of education.





Answer Choices

Responses

Less than 5

2.86%

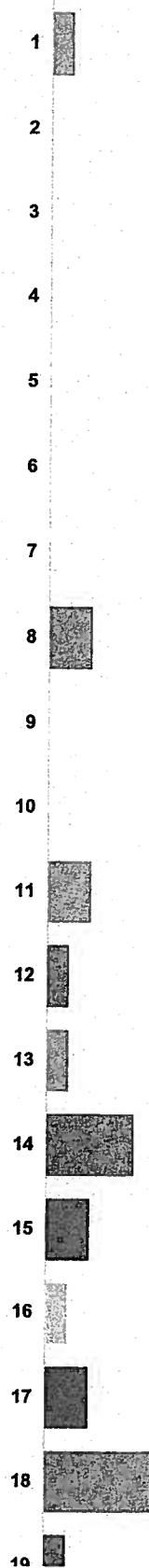
6

0.00%

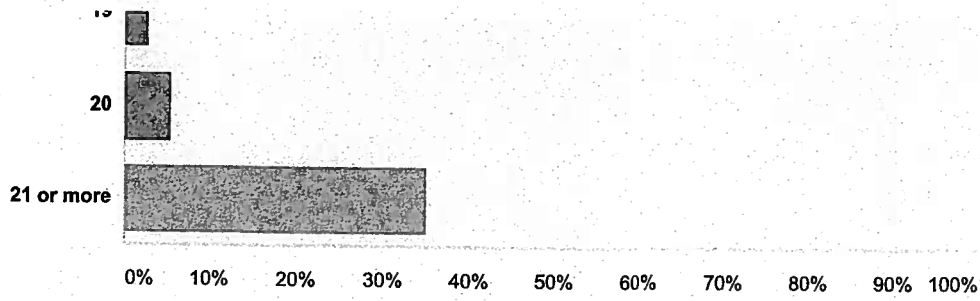
7	0.00%
8	0.00%
9	0.00%
10	0.00%
11	0.00%
12	0.00%
13	0.00%
14	0.00%
15	0.00%
16	2.86%
17	2.86%
18	0.00%
19	2.86%
20	5.71%
21	5.71%
22	0.00%
23	5.71%
24	2.86%
25	0.00%
26	0.00%
27	0.00%
28	2.86%
29	5.71%
30	11.43%
31	2.86%
32	2.86%
33	5.71%
34	8.57%
35	8.57%
36	5.71%
37	8.57%
38	0.00%

39	0.00%
40 or more	5.71%

**Q4 Years of administrative experience  
including superintendency.**

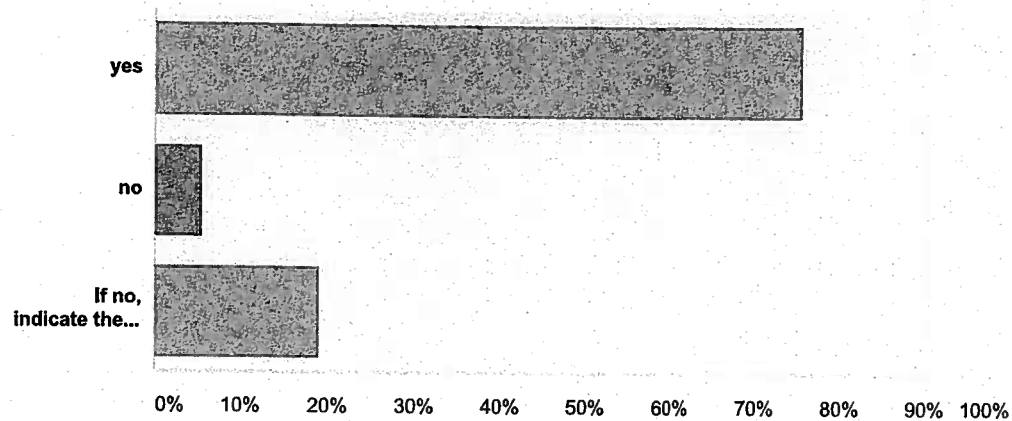






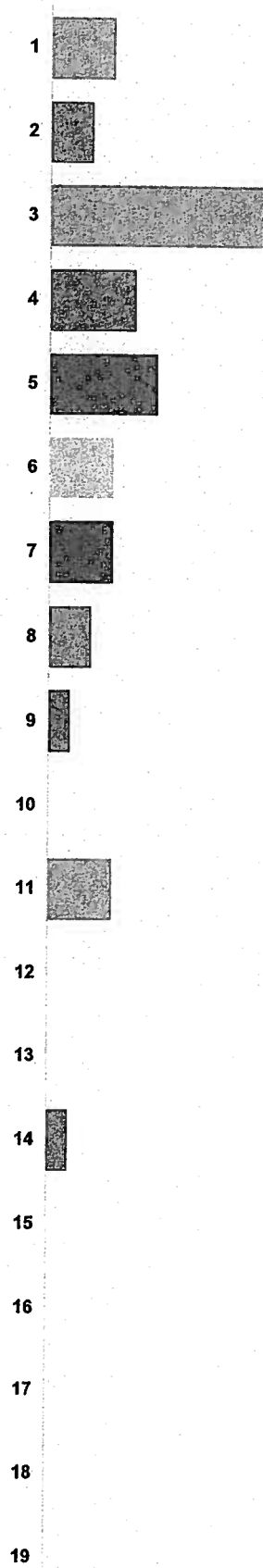
Answer Choices	Responses
1	2.70%
2	0.00%
3	0.00%
4	0.00%
5	0.00%
6	0.00%
7	0.00%
8	5.41%
9	0.00%
10	0.00%
11	5.41%
12	2.70%
13	2.70%
14	10.81%
15	5.41%
16	2.70%
17	5.41%
18	13.51%
19	2.70%
20	5.41%
21 or more	35.14%

### Q5 Is this your first superintendency?



Answer Choices		Responses
yes		75.68%
no		5.41%
If no, indicate the number of superintendent positions held.		18.92%
#	If no, indicate the number of superintendent positions held.	Date
1	2	
2	3	3/26/2015 3:13 PM
3	2	3/25/2015 11:08 AM
4	2	3/4/2015 3:34 PM
5	3	2/11/2015 4:55 AM
6	2	2/9/2015 11:20 AM
7	3	2/9/2015 10:25 AM

## Q6 How many years in current position?

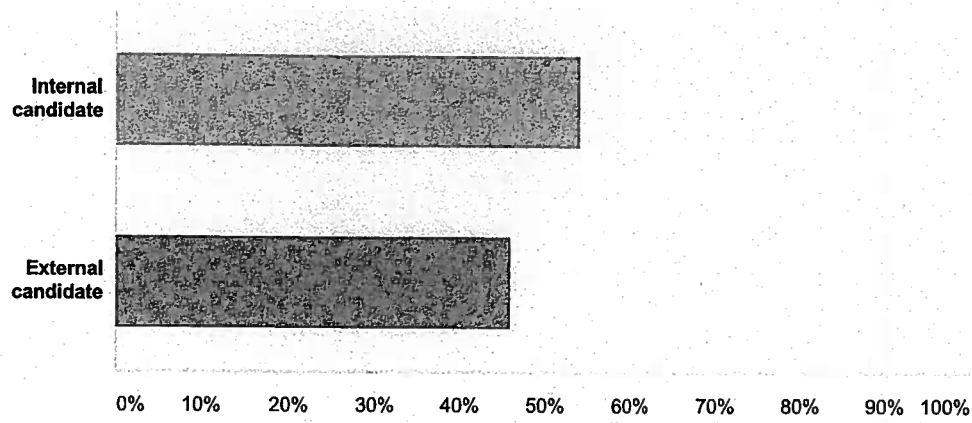


20 or more

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

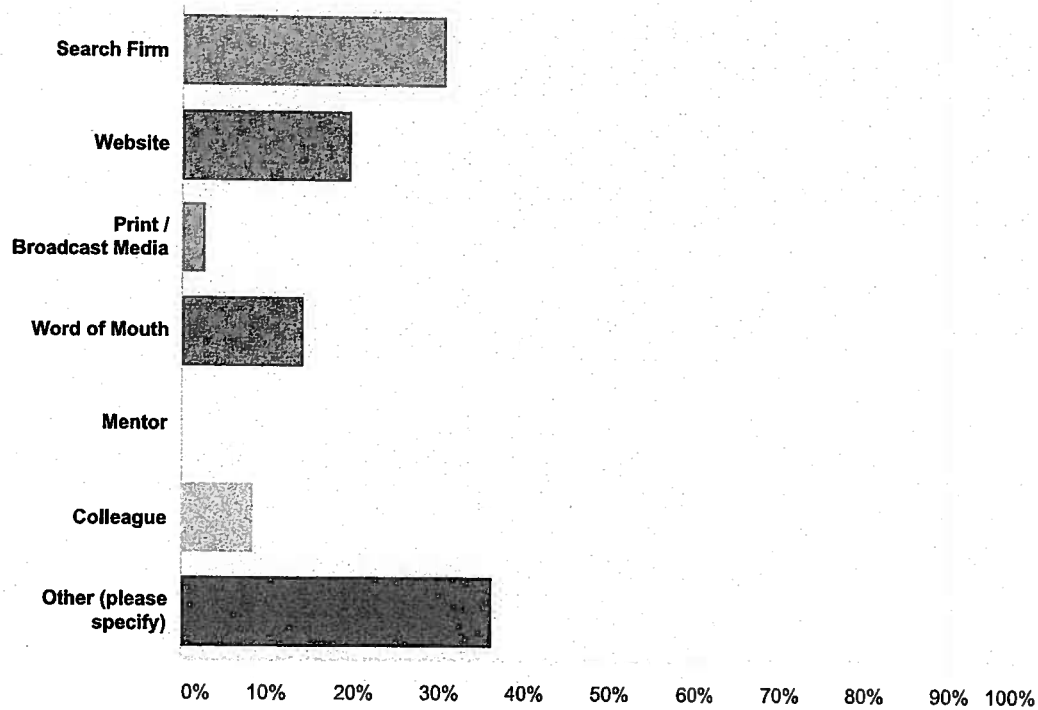
Answer Choices	Responses
1	8.11%
2	5.41%
3	27.03%
4	10.81%
5	13.51%
6	8.11%
7	8.11%
8	5.41%
9	2.70%
10	0.00%
11	8.11%
12	0.00%
13	0.00%
14	2.70%
15	0.00%
16	0.00%
17	0.00%
18	0.00%
19	0.00%
20 or more	0.00%

Q7 Were you an ....



Answer Choices	Responses
Internal candidate	54.05%
External candidate	45.95%

## Q8 How were you made aware of the position?



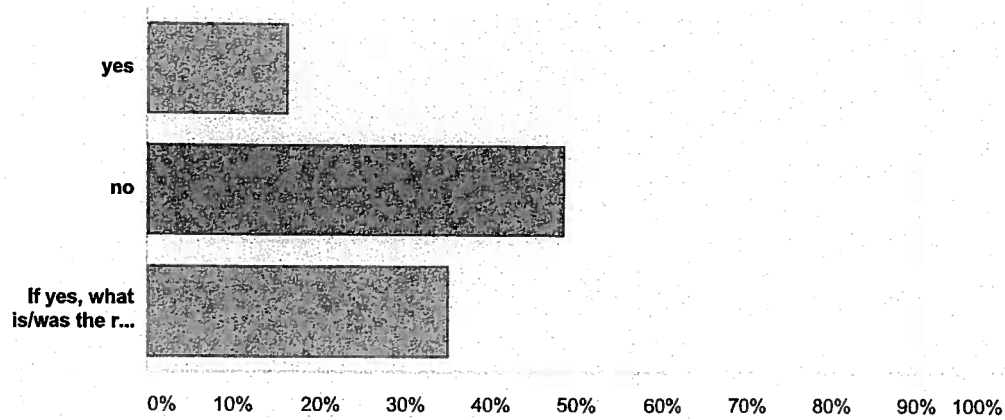
Answer Choices	Responses
Search Firm	30.56%
Website	19.44%
Print / Broadcast Media	2.78%
Word of Mouth	13.89%
Mentor	0.00%
Colleague	8.33%
Other (please specify)	36.11%

Other (please specify)	
Previous superintendent retired	
My Superintendent notified me that his contract was not going to be renewed.	
confidential	
The board suspended the supt. and called on me to serve as the interim.	
Appointed by BOE as Interim. After one year, appointed by BOE as Superintendent	
Regional Office of Education notification	

	School Board approached me asking if I would be interested in pursuing a superintendency degree.	
	Served as Asst. Supt. in same district	
	I was asked to apply	
	When the former superintendent decided to retire, he recommended that the board consider me.	
	internal	
	Board Member	
	I was on search committee.	

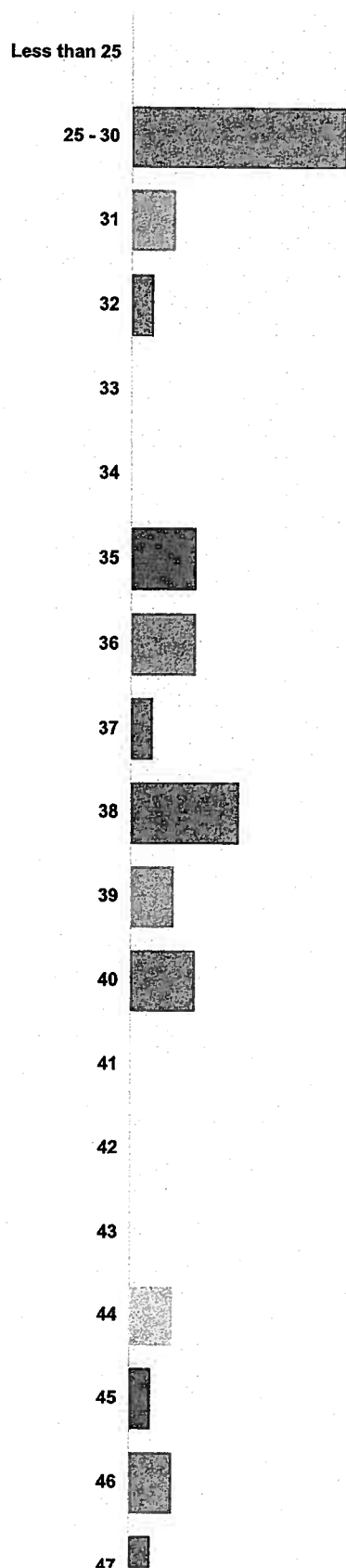
# **Q9 Do/Did you have a mentor that assisted you along your journey in acquiring the position of school district superintendent?**

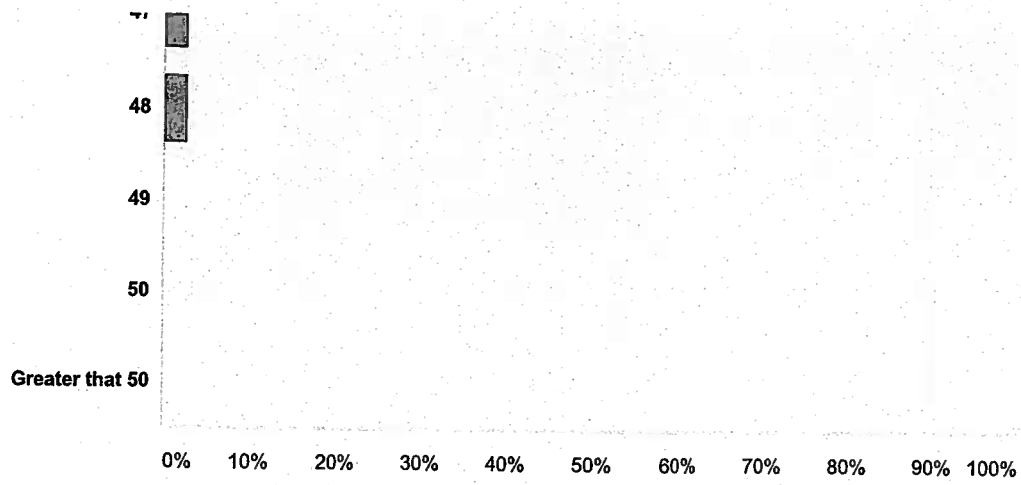


Answer Choices	Responses
yes	16.22%
no	48.65%
If yes, what is/was the race and gender of the individual?	35.14%
If yes, what is/was the race and gender of the individual?	
African American	
White, male	
One white male and one white female	
caucasian both male and female.	
white female	
White and male	
Black, male	
white male	
White male	
white, male	
male white	
white male	
White Malle	



**Q10 What age were you when you attained  
your first administrative position?**

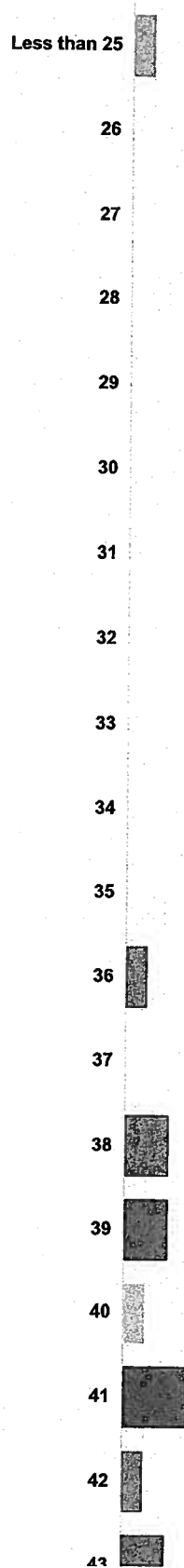


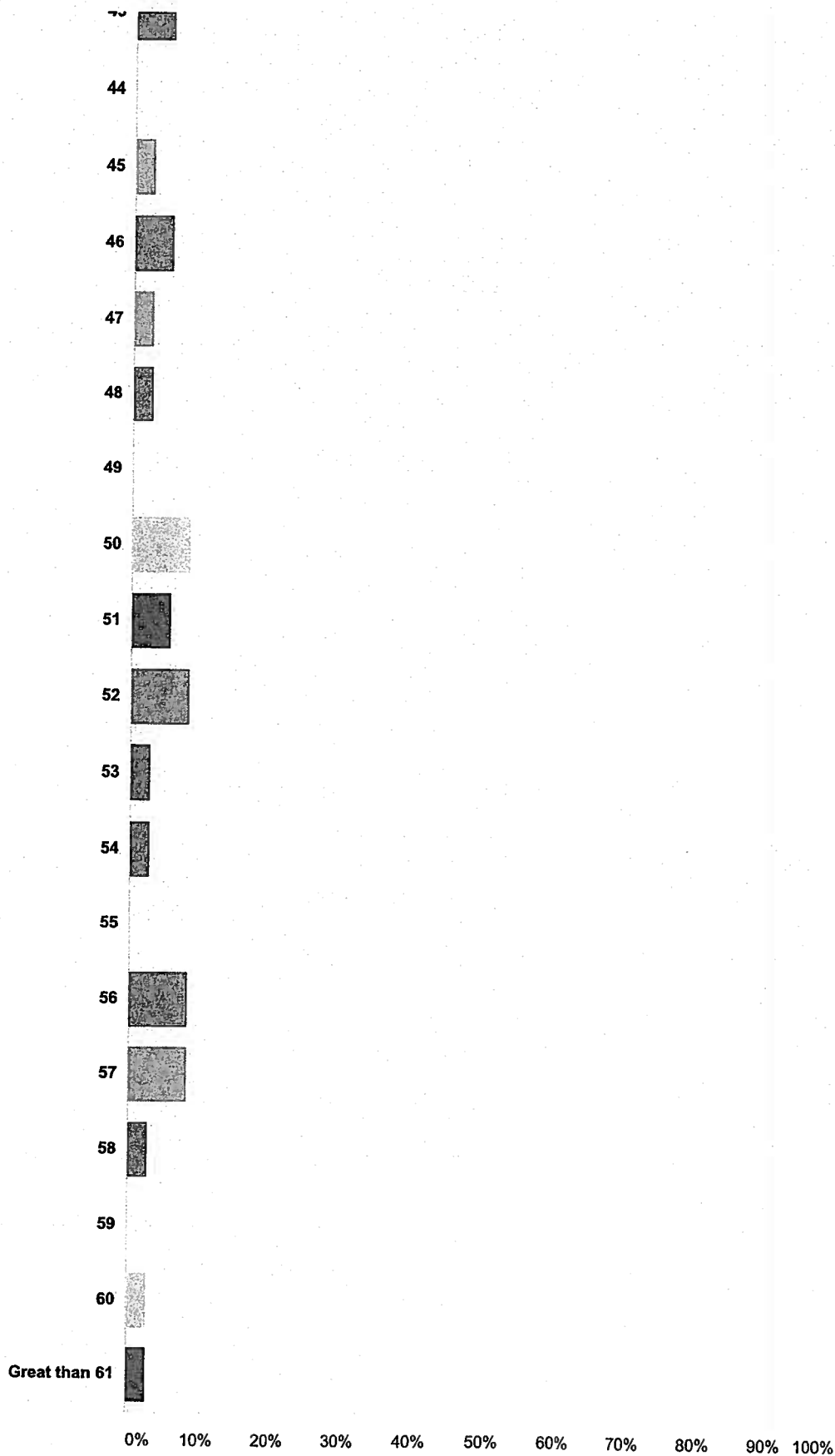


Answer Choices	Responses
Less than 25	0.00%
25 - 30	27.03%
31	5.41%
32	2.70%
33	0.00%
34	0.00%
35	8.11%
36	8.11%
37	2.70%
38	13.51%
39	5.41%
40	8.11%
41	0.00%
42	0.00%
43	0.00%
44	5.41%
45	2.70%
46	5.41%
47	2.70%
48	2.70%
49	0.00%
50	0.00%

Greater than 50	0.00%
	1

**Q11 What age were you when you attained your first position as superintendent?**



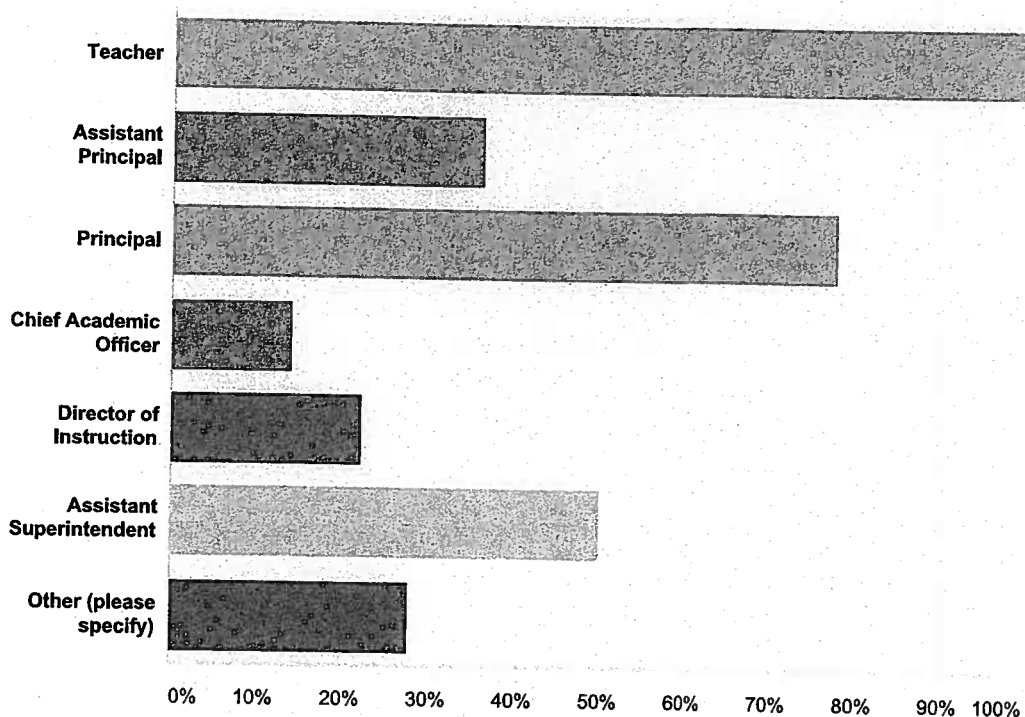


Answer Choices	Responses
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Less than 25	2.70%
26	0.00%
27	0.00%
28	0.00%
29	0.00%
30	0.00%
31	0.00%
32	0.00%
33	0.00%
34	0.00%
35	0.00%
36	2.70%
37	0.00%
38	5.41%
39	5.41%
40	2.70%
41	8.11%
42	2.70%
43	5.41%
44	0.00%
45	2.70%
46	5.41%
47	2.70%
48	2.70%
49	0.00%
50	8.11%
51	5.41%
52	8.11%
53	2.70%
54	2.70%
55	0.00%
56	8.11%

57	8.11%
58	2.70%
59	0.00%
60	2.70%
Great than 61	2.70%

**Q12 Describe your career trajectory to the position of superintendent. Check all that apply.**



Answer Choices	Responses
Teacher	100.00%
Assistant Principal	36.11%
Principal	77.78%
Chief Academic Officer	13.89%
Director of Instruction	22.22%
Assistant Superintendent	50.00%
Other (please specify)	27.78%

Other (please specify)	
Special Ed Director	
Teacher Assistant, substitute teacher, teacher leader for music and middle level education	
Special Education Supervisor	
Business owner	
Curriculum Director	



	curriculum and assessment	
	Leader of Elementary Education	
	Asst. Director of Educational Service Cooperative	
	Director of ELL, Title I and other federal programs	
	Interim Superintendent	

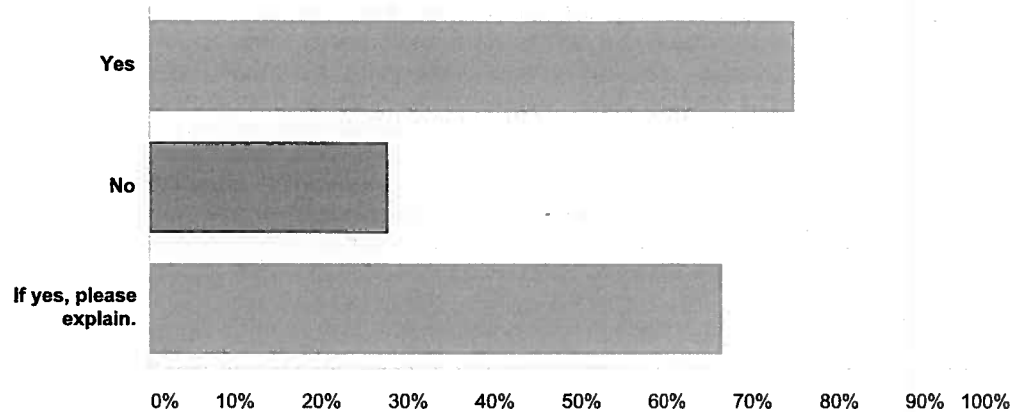
### Q13 What barriers and challenges did you encounter on the road to the superintendency?

Responses	
First female First black	
relocation perception racism sexism	
Caring for an ailing parent was my greatest challenge. Whether working or caring for my parent I felt I should have been doing the other job. I have been fortunate to work in a district where I have had opportunities to learn and grow as an administrator.	
Race, Gender, Age,, etc.	
My age and gender seemed to be a factor in some discussions with search firm representatives.	
Being a female in a district previously run by males and in a very affluent area. Often times I was questions about the decisions made and asked to generate a public explanation. My gender preference was also a concern for some, but has not interfered, with my performance. The biggest push back I get is from members of the Board when tied to decisions centered around finance. I believe I have experience more barriers tied to my gender and genr preference over barriers to race.	
I have experience more racial challenges in my path. I have had to be firm in my stance regarding decisions I have made and continue to make. I notice that my caucasian counterparts are not questioned nor scrutinized nearly as much. I have also experienced sexism. It is very interesting that men don't believe women can be as if not more intelligent than they are. I have had to share my knowledge and experience along the way to assist my male counterparts in understanding that we deserve administrative roles as much as they do. In addition, I have had to demand respect throughout my career; mainly because I have been a young administrator, but in some instances it has been my race and gender. I am blessed to be where I am and dedicated to mentoring others along this path as I have been mentored.	
Racial issues Gender issues Outsider within Lack of Respect at meetings	

	<p>Where do I begin? In my current district where I have served as principal, asst. supt. and deputy supt. I was told that, essentially, I did not have the skills to be superintendent. I did not fit the profile. First and foremost, I am ABD and they preferred someone with a doctorate, no matter their preparation. This would probably limit my access to other superintendent jobs. Secondly, there is a certain superintendent profile that seems to be expected, especially in predominantly Black communities. Although I had served as the asst. supt. and worked with staff to align curriculum to standards, scores were raised 27%, facilitated local and state-wide recognition to staff, developed a comprehensive mentoring program for new staff, focused on school improvement and meaningful professional development, etc., the board of education would not even interview me the first time the position came open. I remember a board meeting when someone in the audience asked the search firm if there were any internal candidates. They did not identify me, but said there was one. They also said that they were familiar with my university where I was still trying to complete my degree and that anyone who was taking "so many years plus" to finish, probably wouldn't. (As it turns out, they were right.) Well, everyone in the room knew they were talking about me. So they brought in someone else, but I continued to focus in on moving the district along academically. After a year and a half, the board was dissatisfied with him. I got a call one evening asking if I would accept being interim supt. because they had suspended the supt. For several months I was doing both the job of Asst. Supt. and Supt. Even after they made me the interim, I had to fight to become the candidate for the superintendency as members of the board continued to criticize. My physical appearance (overweight), the way I wore my hair, understated manner and other personal qualities were critiqued. The fact that I had a good relationship with teachers was seen as suspect instead of being seen as a positive quality to bring about change and move the district into 21st century learning. The fact that I had an outstanding academic background, a track record of success and had been recognized by several reputable educational organizations meant little because my board did not seem to have an understanding of their legitimacy or they just did not care. The interesting thing about all of this is that I had spent most of my career in more integrated settings. This was my first job in a predominantly African American school district. I truly believed that I could dispel the myth of the "achievement gap." Still do. However, I have had to try to better understand the local culture of working in a "middle class" African American suburb. I believe all communities have high expectations for their students, but navigating the local politics has been very challenging. Some of it, I think, would be different if I were male and my authority would be less challenged by staff and board. People take being nice and pleasant for weakness, but they get offended when you assert yourself. Despite all of this, I think we have had many successes and that our district has moved far in a positive way and continues to do so. I must still be here for a reason. I love the students and families I interact with. The other challenge has been my role as wife and mother. I had my own son to educate. Balancing working with his challenges and making sure he progressed in school and my work with the district meant I had to let something go and that was finishing the dissertation. As well, I had to deal with my spouse's reaction as I have moved up the ladder while he suffered setbacks in his own career path without letting it affect my job performance.</p>	
	None that I can think of at this time.	
	Inexperience in the superintendency position and the rarity of women superintendents in Nebraska.	
	The greatest challenge I have encountered is with colleagues taking me seriously. I believe my race and age have been obstacles for me.	
	I "sat on" my superintendent endorsement for 5 years before deciding to make the move. I enjoyed being a principal so I stayed in that role until I was ready to make a move. I did not have any barriers or challenges when I decided to move up. I was hired for the first superintendent job I applied for.	
	I was elected by popular vote to my first superintendency. Once I began to interview after that I found that men typically were hired even when I was in the top two or three.	
	This year marks my 30th year as a Superintendent. I began my career as a kindergarten teacher, quite an unlikely path to a superintendency. The educational community was very accepting of a female principal but less so to a female superintendent. In fact, I switched districts because I did not feel the board of my previous district would ever consider a female for the position. As a female, you often must prove your abilities in areas that are more traditionally male focused such as transportation, facilities, and finance.	
	The fact that I had no experience as a superintendent presented challenges. I also believe that I was not hired for one position as superintendent because I was a female.	
	I did not have barriers. However, challenges were around perceptions around the topics involved the fear of the unknown given I was different than the past candidates for administrative roles	
	As a mother of young children, it was challenging to attain my degree. Other superintendents from neighboring districts were very encouraging and provided good mentoring.	

	Perception that women can't handle the myriad of responsibilities associated with being a superintendent. This was fostered by a retiring superintendent when I was assistant superintendent who told the board I wasn't ready to step into his position.	
	Board satisfaction with the job that I did as deputy—did not want me to take on a superintendency.	
	Politics—I had to campaign the first time that I became superintendent. Now I have to please 5 board members and watch the political maneuvering going on behind my back to keep the position.	
	Being a woman, I had to prove myself so much more than some of the men. My background in early childhood was not looked at well at times as a precursor to a superintendency. I had a strong background in curriculum and assessment and this helped me get the administrative positions that wanted an "instructional leader." I did not feel comfortable purchasing a house since the boards were mostly men and they could change their minds at anytime since they seemed more critical of a woman administrator than a man. The expectations were much higher for a woman than a man. I was hired to do the grunt work at one elementary building since the state was coming into the district to evaluate them and the men on the team did not want to do the work. This was shared with me by everyone but the male administrators I think the rural communities in Iowa have a more difficult time accepting a female superintendent than more metropolitan and urban communities.	
	None of the road to superintendency	
	No barriers or challenges in coming to this position.	
	Age- being young people thought I was not ready for the position. Race- I am the 4th black female in the state of TN. Primarily white men are hired in this position. I had to work harder and hold a doctorate degree to be considered when others did not.	
	The board did not want to move me from the principal position because I had done an excellent job.	
	I had to live 400 miles from my husband for 3 years when we were both administrators.	
	Concerns that a woman "couldn't handle a couple of strong minded administrators" and concerns that I was following a minority superintendent who was very well respected (and rightly so). During his tenure, board relations improved vastly over the previous superintendent and race issues were usually not a factor.	
	none	
	This was not a position I aspired to, therefore, I did not experience barriers. I have experience men making more money than I in most administrative positions I held.	
	I was not a principal prior to being a superintendent.	
	Being a female in a "male role" Perception that women would not be strong enough to "handle the stress" Getting interviews Getting doctoral completed while working full-time.	
	Always being looked over for a man. Being African American female in a district with White or Black men in a community that previewed White was right.	
	Rural nature of our community made ongoing education difficult. Managing being a mother & wife with responsibilities.	
	-Seeking a very good mentor to ask innocent questions of as well as preparing an interview -Completing the Ed.d	
	Getting experience	

# **Q14 Do you perceive these barriers/challenges to be associated to your gender and/or race?**



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	75.00%
No	27.78%
If yes, please explain.	66.67%

If yes, please explain.
There were those who shared that it took a man to do the job. Some of these comments came from parents. There were black administrators who shared "you are moving up so fast that you must be 'kissing up' to get your positions.
Assumptions are made that women are strong in curriculum and instruction, but not in management and finance.
Yes, I believe women are acculturated to be caregivers. My natural personality and my upbringing make me inclined to try to do my best in all my endeavors. I have been the first African American and/or the first women in some of my professional roles so I felt the need to be a good role model and to demonstrate ability and competence so those that follow would have less consideration given to race and/or gender.
It seemed as though in a few cases I was treated like a little girl. One person asked me "What can I say to intimidate you?"
Gender, and gender preference. see #13.
Please see my answer for question #13.
As a woman of color it appears that I have to fight hard to get my voice heard.

	I feel women are at a huge disadvantage just because of our gender. We are perceived as not being strong leaders.	
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## Q15 What barriers and challenges exist in your role as superintendent?

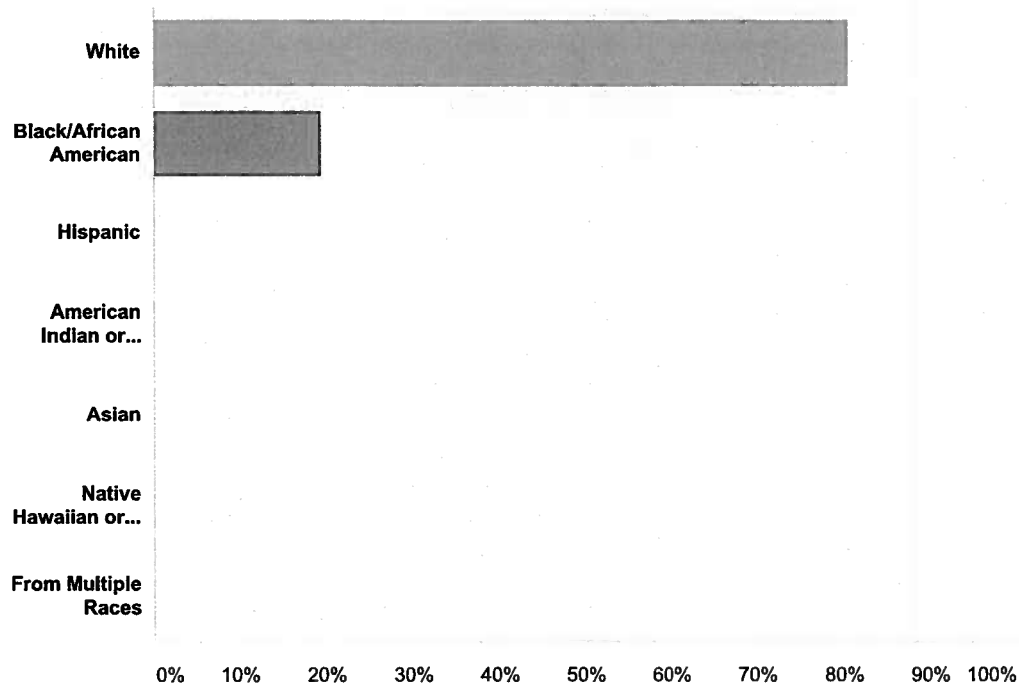
Responses
First black and female with a 72% Latino student population district which has never had a minority superintendent. The staff and administration is 98+% Caucasian. The 6 Caucasian and 1 Latina board member have been very supportive as they have witnessed success within the district. Any barriers and challenges are those which all school districts facing poverty face. No others exist in my current district where I have been superintendent for five years.
politics gender and race biases of board members
Meeting the needs of our students, staff and community with scarce resources. Keeping our district financially and academically sound. Being the leader of leaders is challenging. Recognizing the importance of providing support and assistance while developing the leadership capacity of other administrators, staff, parents, students. Managing time. The responsibilities require attention 24/7. It is hard to establish and maintain a the relationships that are personally meaningful.
Gender and race
I am in the midst of making significant changes in the district compared to the way my predecessor handled things. Some administrators have difficulty adjusting.
See #13. Other female superintendents accept me (across color lines). There is however, one White female superintendent who does not acknowledge my presence or speak to me. There could be an empty seat beside me in a meeting and she will sit as far away from me as possible. Then there are the good old boys who only acknowledge me if I just happen to be a committee with them.
The same barriers and challenges that have existed throughout my entire career as an administrator; sexism, racism and ageism. I have gleaned years of experience on this journey so I am better able to address and deal with these barriers and challenges when they arise. During my first year, I had to complete construction on a \$34 million dollar junior high school. I cannot begin to explain the travesties I encountered from the financial corporation, to the builders and the architects. Nevertheless, I am humble and pleased to state that I prevailed with professionalism, directness, intelligence and class. It is always interesting to identify men who are attempting to manipulate me, but I am not supposed to be intelligent enough to recognize the manipulation. I have become a master at this particular strategy! :)
It's still hard because I am a black woman and I have to sell ideas and prove everything. White men do not have to do this.
I am the first Black and female superintendent in my district. The community demographic has shifted due to economics. While this is essentially a Black, middle class suburb, the number of free/reduced lunch students has tripled in 14 years. This provides some challenge for making sure we are meeting the needs of all of our students and, to a large extent, their families. The challenge of providing a "world class" education and making sure we provide all the supports to get our children prepared for competing in a global economy. I am also challenged by an increasingly contentious board with personal agendas and keeping them focused on their role. As one of the largest employers in the community, we spend far too much time on who gets hired and "keeping our dollars in our community," sometimes not hiring the most qualified individuals in a large metropolitan area. I also have had current or former board members who are also former employees who were terminated and then ran for the board. As I have said, the politics of the community provides major challenges. One had better know who the players are and who they are related to. Essentially, I have to strategize to minimize the board's perception that I have seven bosses. Maintaining a trusting relationship between the superintendent and the Board of Education and still maintaining my integrity cannot be underestimated and is a major challenge for me as superintendent. I am almost afraid to take off time for my own self-care, meaning a week or more of vacation, because I don't know what I would find when I return. Personally, I am what they call a "tween" I think. Although my son is successfully moving on with the next level of his education and I am not as focused on him, I am now faced with strategizing to ensure the care of aging parents.
Status as a female in a male dominated role,
good ole boys club mentality at meetings

	My greatest challenge is working with the board.	
	State Funding Federal Funding Unfunded Mandates Enrollment Special Education numbers are increasing Hard to fill positions PARCC New Teacher Evaluation Plans	
	At one point, I think that there were those who preferred a male superintendent. However, after working with me, I think people within the organization began to see the positive qualities of a female superintendent.	
	I believe after eight years, the barriers and challenges are probably not that different than my male counterparts.	
	Being in a small District presents an issue of having enough funds to place individuals with expertise over responsibilities related to such things as grounds and facilities. This means that as superintendent I must become familiar with all areas in order to make informed decisions.	
	A challenge that is faces can be stereotypes about underserved communities, which is what I serve	
	Sometimes male support staff challenge my authority but we have learned to work through it.	
	For the most part I feel I have been well received in my role as superintendent. There is a barrier in making connections in our small community as a female, especially since I am single, so developing the community relations is harder. Some of the male employees have had a harder time with a female boss and have pushed back on some initiatives that I know they wouldn't have done with a male superintendent. And as we have had to go through budget cuts in recent years, our bus drivers have been derogatory to me both to my face and in the public. With most of the staff, however, I feel things have gone well. My previous experience as an assistant superintendent helped prepare me for the job so I have earned their respect because of the work I have been able to do to increase the professionalism in the district, improve our financial situation, and implement new curriculum that is aligned to Common Core.	
	Old politics; being first female; not recognizing significant growth and preparing for it	
	Budget stability and funding Too many people telling me what to do and trying to make decisions, and these people are uninformed.	
	Similar to what I have mentioned above in other answers to barriers and challenges. I also find board members that want to bully me to do what they want but this could be true of male superintendents too. Then, they are angry and want to get rid of you if you don't do as they perceive as best practice.	
	As a women, I believe I started at lower pay. Next year, I will be receiving a raise that will put me at the median of my array.	
	Being a superintendent where approximately 90% of my colleagues are male. I am the only female superintendent in my area. You are constantly navigating a male mind set. It isn't a wrong mind set but a different approach than what I use. Many of my male counterparts are hard chargers that take on a definitive authoritative role while I tend to operate in a more collaborative fashion (I don't have all of the answers all the time).	
	Being young, people tend not to take me serious when I make a decision. I do not feel respected by most board members. Race has not been a factor so far.	
	I live in a very conservative community and work for a conservative school system/board of education. Many members on the board believe a single woman does not need to earn as much as her counterpart. I have been on the lower third of the pay scale in my conference since I was hired 7 years ago. Someone who has 4 years less experience than I do was given an 8% raise while I was given a 5% raise. I have no doubt he will surpass me next year in salary.	
	Working 60+ hours per week is tiring.	
	Although overall perceived as working hard and living and leading based on our vision and mission of our strategic design, I'm not sure I'll ever be man enough or dark enough in the eyes of some.	
	none related to gender and race	
	I am the first female superintendent to hold this position in my district. I sometimes feel as though members of the board question my ability to lead, understand finances and make tough calls. I find this humorous, of course. But the truth is, they like to take credit for the tough calls - and, they were that why with the previous superintendent as well.	



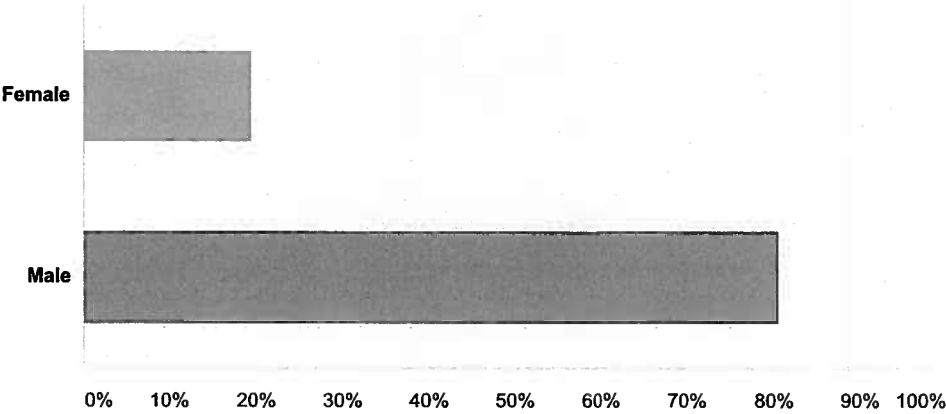
	I was single but engaged prior to accepting my first superintendency. The recruiter for this position was quite concerned about my fiancé and asked that I bring them to my interview. That is not completely unusual in the superintendent hiring process, but it was clear the intent was to find out a bit more about who I was marrying. My fiancé, now husband, reluctantly came to meet the board, but we both agreed it was out of line. I have served as a highly effective superintendent and have exceptional references. I have been recruited to apply at a specific firm 3 times for very high end positions, and in the end an all male slate of finalists have been presented. It is quite clear I am their acceptable token female in the applicant pool.	
	The first year, trust that I knew what I was doing, but after that, they found I did. I was the first female supt. in the community ever, and they questioned the sanity of the board for hiring me.	
	Being second guessed. Asked to do more on a lesser salary than my three predecessors. No respect for my personal time and required to work harder and longer hours than the men in the District. Was told I would not move the district forward - false. Was told I would not make the hard decision - false.	
	The biggest challenge is the demands placed on us by our federal and state departments. Assessment outcomes are always the focus, very stressful for teachers and we waste WAY too much time testing.	
	-being second guessed by some women and men -time to do it all -some board members -legal problems that take up hours -seeing things from a supt. eyes-did not see it as curriculum director	
	I truly believe that because I am a female I am passed over for leadership roles and positions. I can have ideas and thoughts but they don't appear to be important but if one of my male counterparts expresses the same concerns, it appears from my perception it suddenly becomes important.	

## Q16 What is/was the race and of your predecessor?



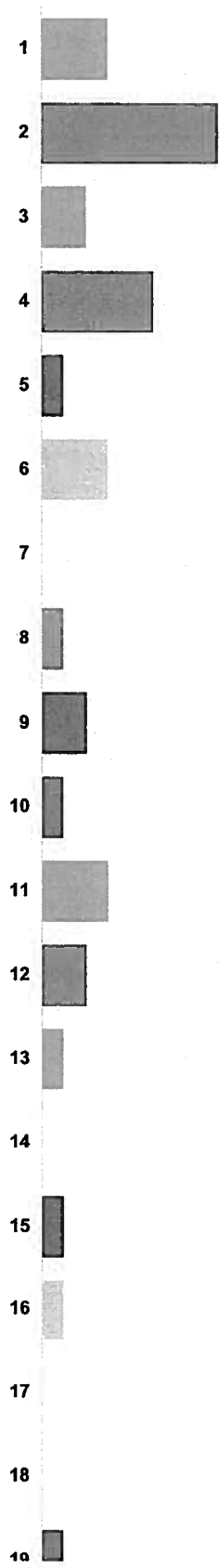
Answer Choices	Responses
White	80.56%
Black/African American	19.44%
Hispanic	0.00%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.00%
Asian	0.00%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.00%
From Multiple Races	0.00%

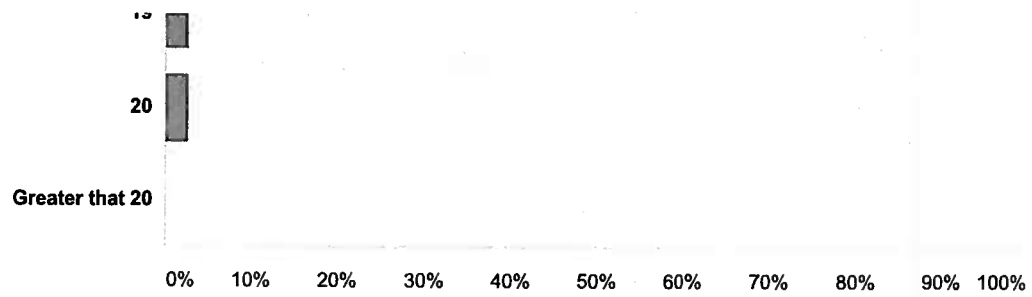
Q17 What is/was the gender of your predecessor?



Answer Choices	Responses
Female	19.44%
Male	80.56%

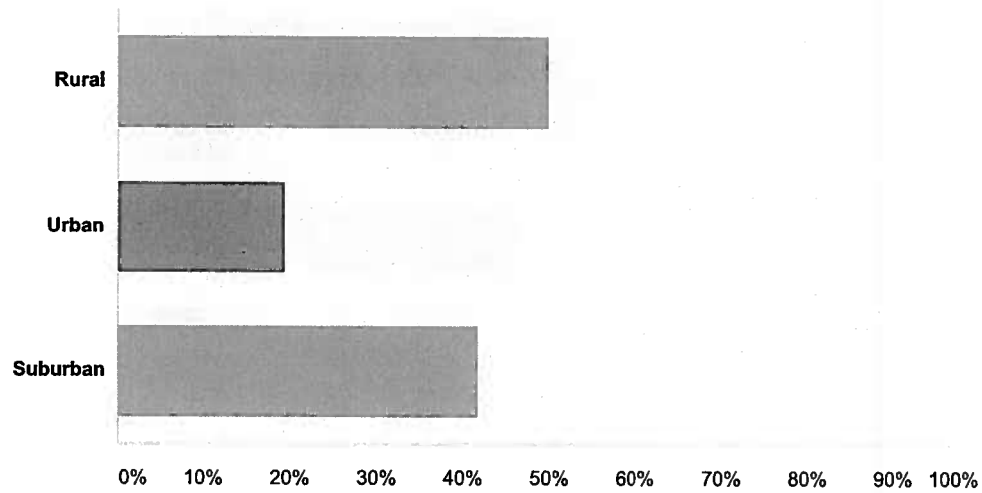
Q18 How many years was she or he superintendent?





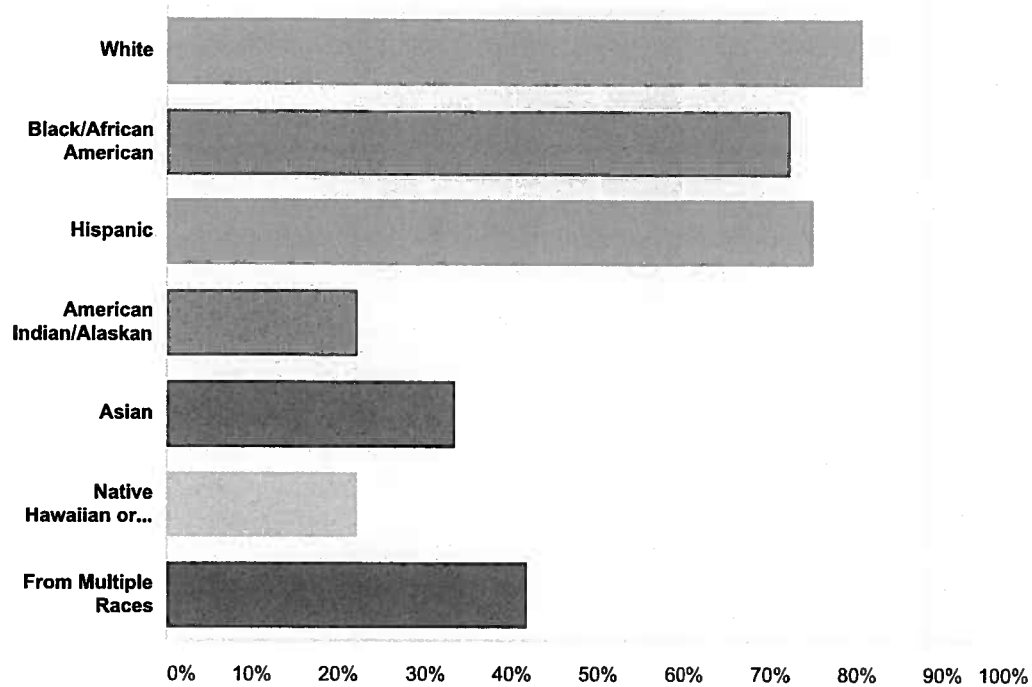
Answer Choices	Responses
1	8.33%
2	22.22%
3	5.56%
4	13.89%
5	2.78%
6	8.33%
7	0.00%
8	2.78%
9	5.56%
10	2.78%
11	8.33%
12	5.56%
13	2.78%
14	0.00%
15	2.78%
16	2.78%
17	0.00%
18	0.00%
19	2.78%
20	2.78%
Greater than 20	0.00%
Total	100.00%

**Q19 Describe the surrounding community where your district is located.**



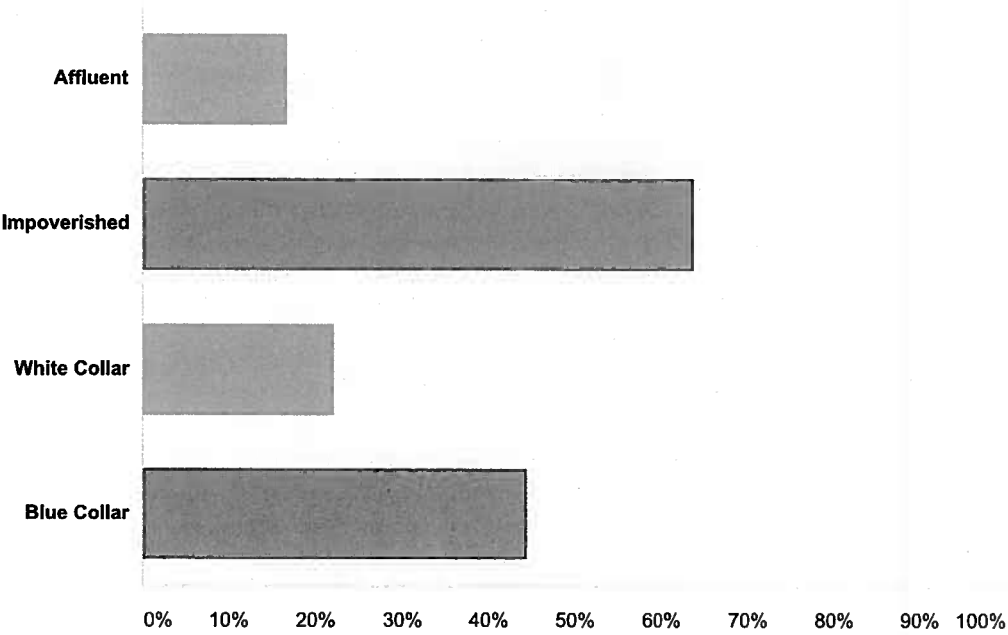
Answer Choices	Responses
Rural	50.00%
Urban	19.44%
Suburban	41.67%

**Q21 What is the demographic of your student population? Check all that apply.**



Answer Choices	Responses
White	80.56%
Black/African American	72.22%
Hispanic	75.00%
American Indian/Alaskan	22.22%
Asian	33.33%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	22.22%
From Multiple Races	41.67%

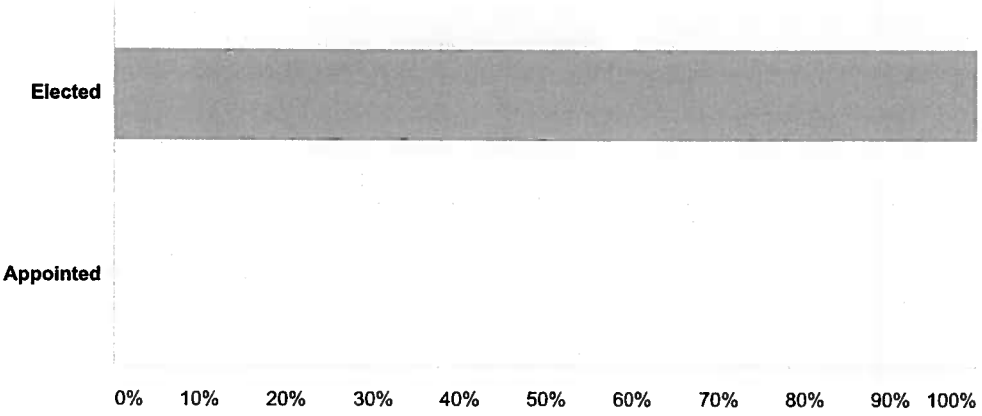
Q22 What is the economic status of your district community?



Answer Choices	Responses
Affluent	16.67%
Impoverished	63.89%
White Collar	22.22%
Blue Collar	44.44%



Q23 Is your Board of Education elected or appointed?



Answer Choices	Responses
Elected	100.00%
Appointed	0.00%

## Q24 What is the make up of your Board of Education?

Answered: 36 Skipped: 2

Responses
6 Caucasian 1 Latina
seven member board
7 members currently 4 men, 3 women 1 African American Man 1 Latino Man 3 Caucasian Women 2 Caucasian Men
All Black, 4 females and 2 males
We have four women and three men on the Board. There are six African American Board members and one Caucasian Board member.
Seven, all white, four men and three women
I have 7 Board members; 6 females and 1 male; 3 former Principals, 1 former Teacher, 2 former Managers and 1 current Manager; all but 1 are retired.
I have six African American Females and one Hispanic Male
Seven members 5 women 2 men 100% African American
Seven member board with professional backgrounds (lawyer, doctor,scientist, psychologist, graphic artist)
5 men--2 farmers, 1 military, 1 business, 1 attorney 1 woman-- teacher
2 white females 1 black male 4 white males
4 white males and 3 white females
We have 3 women and 5 men. They are all white from about 40 years old to 78 years old.
Seven member board. Four white males, two black males, one white female
African American and Caucasian. Five African American males, one Caucasian male and two African American females.
7 Members 6 African American 3 Women 1 White male
5 members 4 female 1 male
4 males, 1 female. All white
5 members (7 in 2016). 4 men and 1 woman
We have 5 members, one from each electoral district. Currently there are 4 men and 1 female on the board.
3 women and 2 men but soon after fall election it will probably be 2 women and 3 men - not looking forward to it. Hospital technician Retired banker Supervisor of large plant Special Education Teacher from another district Business woman in eye care
3 men and 3 women all white.
3 female, 4 male, all white
5 males (3 white- 2 black)
We are a unified system; therefore, there are 3 boards of education. On one board there are 2 businessmen (associated with agribusiness) and 4 women. One is a secretary, one works at home, and the other 2 work in businesses associated with agriculture. On the other board there are 3 farmers, one member works for a company in agribusiness, and the other works for the county roads department. The 3rd board is comprised of members from the other 2 boards. On the Unified board, that makes decisions for the district, are 2 farmers, 3 men who work in agribusiness, and one woman who works for her father who is a farmer.

	3 women 3 men	
	1 white woman 1 black woman 2 black men 3 white men	
	3 women ; 4 men	
	There are 4 women and 3 men on the board. Only one male member of the board minimizes the effectiveness of the women. 5 members are Jewish and would be considered affluent. The district is largely Hispanic and 60% free and reduced - this group is not directly represented. 5 are very politically connected (3 democrats and 2 republicans).	
	5 member board. Directors are elected from specific districts. 3 Males, 2 Females when hired. Now 2 males and 3 females. All are white.	
	2 women 3 men	
	Three White men. Three Black women, one White woman	
	Two women and four men (all are alumni except for two).	
	5 women 2 men 1 Hispanic woman, married 2 white woman, married 2 white woman, divorced 1white man divorced 1 white man, widow	
	Four white males and one white female	